



The
BUNGALOW
BOYS
DEXTER J. FORRESTER

CHS-(148) B

Merry Christmas
1913-



"OH, TANK HEFFENS YOU HAF COME!" EXCLAIMED THE
PROFESSOR, ALMOST IN TEARS.

— Page 52.

THE BUNGALOW BOYS

BY
DEXTER J. FORRESTER

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The Bungalow Boys

CHAPTER I

A ROADSIDE MYSTERY

"The victims of the Phrantic Phive approach. You may fire when ready, my merry men!"

A tall boy of about seventeen turned from an inspection of the white road which lay stretched in the moonlight in front of him and addressed a group of four other lads crouched in the shadow of a dark clump of bushes behind him.

Down the thoroughfare he had spied two portly forms approaching, one of which was that of Professor Schiller Von Goethe Tindelbaum, instructor in German at Audubon Academy, at which all the lads were pupils. The equally bulky personage who accompanied the professor was

his confrere, Professor August Bismark Schnitz, who was a teacher in his native tongue at a girls' academy some distance beyond Audubon, which, as some of my readers may not know, is situated on the west bank of the Hudson, not far above historic West Point.

"Der theory of Kant dot der mindt of man is an agent free as der birdts vot fly mit der air, iss——"

Professor Tindelbaum was declaiming as the two came within earshot, when he broke off with a sudden exclamation.

"Donner und blitzen, vot iss dot?"

From behind the bush where the lookout had now joined the others came a most peculiar sound.

"Tick-tick-tick-tick!"

"Vot idt iss? Cadts, aind't idt?" exclaimed Professor Schnitz.

"I dond't neffer hear no cadts dot go 'tick-tick-tick'," rejoined Professor Tindelbaum, his prominent eyes bulging behind a huge pair of spectacles and his big moustache bristling fiercely.

"Maype dey fighdt," suggested his companion,

a timid little man, with whom the professor, as was his wont on fine moonlight nights, had been taking a stroll, enlivening the way with philosophic talk.

“Maype; und if so——”

The spectacled Teuton broke off abruptly.

Out on the night air there suddenly boomed from behind the bush an appalling sound.

“Be-ware, oh, be-ware. I am the spir-it of the poet Schiller doomed for a certain time to walk the earth. Be-ware, professor. Pass the papers of your German grammar pupils! or be-ware—BE-Ware!”

The mystic voice died out in a kind of a sputtering sound, as if the disembodied spirit had suddenly faded away.

“Ghosds! Leidber Faderlandt, der ghosdt of der greadt Schiller,” screamed Professor Schnitz, who, as has been said, was not gifted with a large amount of courage. He had uttered the exclamation almost at the first sound of the voice, and was now far up the road.

“Kommen zu ouidt!” he kept screaming at Pro-

fessor Tindelbaum, who for a moment had stood rooted to the spot.

"Say, you don't think he's going to make an investigation?" whispered one of the lads behind the bushes; "if he does, and finds the phonograph——"

"Hoot mon, if he shuld do sic a thing I wud be back in bonny Scotland the morn," chuckled another of the group, a raw-boned, freckle-faced lad of sixteen or so, named Glenmorris Campbell MacTavish by his fond parents, but who was known at Audubon by the handier name of Sandy. Young MacTavish had been sent direct from Scotland to the famous Audubon school and had not yet lost his characteristic "burr."

"Look—look there, fellows," suddenly cried Tom Dacre, the lad who had given the signal that all was ready.

"Get up from behind there; it's all right," he urged.

Thus encouraged, the others straightened up from their concealment, somewhat cramped, as

they had been lying in wait for an hour or more. They beheld a laughable sight.

Professor Tindelbaum, after a period of philosophic reflection, had, it seemed, concluded that the mysterious voices were supernatural, for he was beating a retreat toward his bawling friend, not, however, at a run, but at a dignified sort of trot, in keeping with his studious character.

“Turn loose the artillery,” ordered Tom, and five bean-shooters came into play, peppering the retreating professor’s anatomy with their stinging little missiles. Now thoroughly convinced that spirits of some kind were abroad, the professor had increased his pace to a sort of lumbering gallop, which soon carried him and his companion out of sight.

“Do you think they knew what it was?”

The lad who had manipulated the awe-inspiring phonograph was the speaker.

“Know what the soonds were!” shouted Sandy MacTavish derisively; “not much; ‘voss it vos—cats?’ ”

The mimicry of the Scotch lad caused the oth-

ers to burst into a roar of laughter, at the recollection of the two professors' alarm.

"Say, fellows, we'd better be getting back. I want to 'mug-up' for that German to-morrow, and, Tom, you and your brother Jack had better not flunk after this lark, or you'll be in just as bad. Say, it was fun, though. Ha! ha! ha!"

Fredericus Beeton, otherwise Fred Beeton—alias the Living Skeleton—shook with laughter as the reminiscence of the professors' flight once more overtook him.

"Say, Skeleton, quit that. Your bones rattle," struck in Jack Dacre, Tom's younger brother, a lad of about sixteen, with the same curly brown hair and twinkling eyes as his fun-loving brother.

"The Skeleton's right," went on "Beetle" McIntyre, who had earned his nickname by his habit of dressing in sombre black, and his peculiar gait, "it's after ten now, and we've got to sneak in, as it is."

"Well, come on, then. Gather up the phonograph and stow the artillery," ordered Tom Dacre, the recognized leader of the Phrantic

Phive, as the quintette was known among the lads at Audubon; "it's no part of my plans for the summer to get a lot of extra work chucked on me to make up next term."

Five minutes later Tom's phonograph was tucked under his arm, the "record of terror," as the Phrantic Phive had christened it, being carried by his brother Jack. The Living Skeleton, who had "spoken" the record upon a blank disc of wax—being as remarkable for a deep voice as he was for lack of flesh—walked proudly unburdened. He felt that he had fulfilled his part in the evening's fun.

"Hurry up alretty or vee be cotched by der votchmans," warned Sandy, in his best imitation of the professor, as they hastened along. No such accident happened, however, the lads' strategy proving superior to such a catastrophe.

A short distance from the school campus was a deep pit which had at one time been excavated to obtain gravel for walk-making purposes. This hole was now overgrown with weeds, and on its margin were several big rocks. By dint of over-

turning one of these boulders, the lads effected an unobserved entrance, for, while the watchman was scurrying toward the pit, to see who or what had caused the sudden noise, the conspirators slipped silently behind some lilac bushes and thence gained their respective rooms in secrecy.

"Hoot mon! I ken new watchmen aye hae their uses," were Sandy's parting words, as he and the two Dacres, who slept in the same corridor, parted for the night.

About an hour later a hired conveyance, from the village at which the two professors had attended the meeting, drove up. The crunching of wheels on the graveled drive awoke Tom and his brother, who cautiously peeped out of their open window. Below they could see Professor Tindelbaum bidding farewell to Professor Schnitz.

"They were too scared to walk home, and hired a rig," grinned Tom, whispering to Jack.

"Nod a vord of dis to a soul, my lieber Schnitz, till ve investergate by der inside," warned the Audubon professor, as he said "good-night" to his colleague:

"Den you don'd dink id vos ghosts?" inquired Professor Schnitz.

"I dink id vos *boys*," was the reply, "und ve get them blue-handed mitt der dry goods if ve vatch und wait."

"Aber, if it vos boys, vy you run?" demanded the puzzled Professor Schnitz, while the boys in the window above doubled up with suppressed laughter.

"I woss tired of valking alretty," rejoined Professor Tindelbaum, with dignity, as he entered the portal of the school.

Tom Dacre and his brother were orphans from the West, where their father had been a supposedly wealthy ranchman. His death, however, some years before, while they were "freshies" at Audubon, had revealed the fact that he had become bitten with the mining fever and had traded his ranch off for some mining land, which, it turned out, was about as worthless as so many barren rocks. The boys, the death of whose mother had preceded that of their other parent by some years, found themselves at his decease,

therefore, practically penniless and without friends.

In this extremity an old uncle in Maine, of whose existence they had scarcely known up to that time, came to their aid. This uncle had been appointed their guardian by their father in his will, and he readily undertook the task. One provision, however, alone did he make, and that was that he was to be left undisturbed in his solitude on his Maine estate. He did not want his retreat broken in upon by his nephews or any other human being. The boys' dealings with him, therefore, had been through Mr. Philo Pennington, who was an attorney in Bangor, Maine. Most of their vacations had been spent at the school or with friends, of whom their bright and cheerful dispositions had made them any amount.

On the athletic field, gridiron or diamond, or in the class rooms, it would have been hard to find two more popular lads than the two Dacre boys.

It was near the close of the term at Audubon, and everybody was deep in examinations and

“mugging” therefor. The general abstraction, however, did not affect the Phrantic Five, who were bright lads and pretty sure of passing in all their studies, but German. The phonographic warning of Professor Tindelbaum had accordingly been thought up; though to minds more mature than those of the Phrantic Five it may seem doubtful that such an expedient would have much influence.

Immediately after chapel next morning it was announced that Thomas and John Dacre were wanted in the doctor’s study. The two exchanged glances with the three other Phrantic Phivers. It appeared as if, after all, they had been detected, and retribution was about to be dealt out.

There was no help for it but to obey the summons, and the two lads, with rather lively apprehensions of what was to come, wended their way to the wing of the building in which the sacred precincts of Dr. Almeric Parsons’ study were located.

“It’s all up now,” groaned Jack, as Tom

knocked, and in response to his rather quavering summons a deep-toned voice rejoined:

“Come in.”

CHAPTER II

SOME STRANGE NEWS

To the boys' surprise, however—for they had more than once seen it otherwise, notably some months before, on the occasion of the temporary disappearance of the school bell—the doctor's clean-shaven, firm face was friendly enough as they entered with expressions of anything but ease on their own countenances.

The first thing they noticed—after their first awestruck glance at the doctor's face, to see if any danger signals were flying there—was that an old gentleman in black, with big horn-rimmed spectacles, was seated in an easy chair in the corner of the study and gazing at them with peculiar interest.

"This is Mr. Philo Pennington, your uncle's

lawyer," said Dr. Parsons. "Sit down, boys, and be prepared to hear some startling news."

The boys exchanged glances. What could be coming next?

"It is my duty as your uncle's former legal representative," began Mr. Pennington solemnly, and then—seeing, doubtless, by the quick look of interrogation on Tom's face that he had noticed the "former"—the lawyer went on: "I say former because Mr. Chisholm Dacre is"—he paused impressively—"dead."

It would have been hypocritical for the boys to pretend that they felt more than a passing shock at the intelligence. For years—all their lives, in fact, for they had not seen him since they were infants—their uncle had been more of a shadowy being to them than a reality. They knew that the death of a young and beautiful wife at an early age had driven him to seek a lonely existence in the solitudes of the Maine wilderness, where he had lived practically the life of a hermit. They knew, too, that their uncle's funds had kept them at school and provided for them, after the

small residue of their father's estate had been expended in paying the numerous debts which were practically the sole result of his mining venture. Beyond this, however, as has been said, their uncle existed for them more as a visionary personage than a living being.

"The circumstances of his death were remarkable," went on the lawyer. "I may say extraordinary. He embarked mysteriously from Eastport, Maine, in a barque called the *Jessie E. Scotland*, bound for a West Indian port. The *Scotland* was reported some time since as missing, then as lost. A few days ago we received indisputable evidence that all on board were drowned, among them your uncle. It is my present duty to inform you that by a will he made some time ago and deposited with me, that you are beneficiaries under that document."

The attorney coughed dryly as he concluded this lawyerlike statement of the case.

The boys gasped. It was all so unexpected, so sudden, that they were utterly bereft of words.

"However," went on the lawyer, "his last testa-

ment is as eccentric as any of your uncle's behavior. It is of a piece with his life. He bequeaths to you boys \$10,000 each at your coming of age, and until that time you are to be under my guardianship."

"We are glad of that," breathed Tom, who had understood but little of the lawyer's jargon.

"Besides the moneys mentioned," continued Mr. Pennington, "your uncle leaves you the estate and bungalow in Maine on which he passed his lonely life. On this remarkable condition, that every summer of your lives you are to spend your vacations there till you have discovered 'The Leaden Key to a Golden Fortune.'"

"Wh-what's that, sir?" gasped Tom.

"I profess I am mystified," exclaimed the doctor.

"No wonder," agreed the lawyer. "I have not the slightest idea, either, what it can mean, unless it refers to some buried or concealed treasure of some kind."

The boys' eyes sparkled. Buried treasure!

What magic there is for adventurous lads in those two words.

Perhaps the lawyer noted their shining eyes, for he quickly exclaimed:

“Mind you, I have no idea of what the clause means. My only reason for speculating on it was that your uncle was reputed to be quite a miser, and to have a great deal more money than he gave out to the world. However, whether you find the vague possibility referred to or not, the estate is divided between you for life unless you discover the Leaden Key, when it becomes yours absolutely.”

“And if we do not find it, sir?” asked Tom.

“Then the property reverts to the county. Besides requiring you to reside on his estate under the conditions named, your uncle has left in my hands a sum of money for your needs which you can draw on as required. What do you think of it?”

“I—I think, sir, it sounds like a fairy tale,” blurted out Jack.

“Or the Arabian Nights,” supplemented Tom.

"Nevertheless, it is a solid fact," went on the lawyer, "and this brings us to a practical question: What are you boys going to do about it?"

"Why, there seems only one thing to do, sir, and that is to comply with the terms of the will," said Tom eagerly.

"Hum—yes. But young men of your age cannot go into the wilds of Maine alone; eh, doctor?"

The boys' faces fell.

"The doctor here and I, however, have been consulting over this remarkable will," resumed the lawyer, seeing their disappointment, "and we think we see a way out of the difficulty."

"Yes, sir," urged Tom anxiously.

"Professor Tindelbaum——"

He paused as a burst of suppressed laughter came from both boys.

"Professor Tindelbaum, I am informed——"

"I beg your pardon, sir," exclaimed Tom, the first to recover himself. "I had a sudden attack of coughing. My throat——"

"So had I," put in Jack, purple in the face, "a-hem—a-hem."

"Professor Tindelbaum," resumed the lawyer, "is, I am informed, a worthy and conscientious instructor. The doctor tells me that he cannot go to Germany this vacation as usual, as there is an epidemic of smallpox in his home town. The doctor has suggested that it might be feasible for him to take charge of you boys in Maine."

The boys were about to protest when a sudden thought of the limitless opportunities for fun with the professor flashed across their minds, and they refrained.

"We think—that is, I do, sir—that it would be an excellent idea," exclaimed Tom.

"Same here—I mean of course I agree," chimed in Jack, blushing confusedly at his "break."

"Then that part of it is settled. You will need a cook, and as I am called to England on business, we have decided that you may take Jasper, my colored man. He is an excellent fellow, and will be useful to you. The expense of his keep and so on will of course be borne by me, and that of Professor Tindelbaum will fall on himself."

As the lawyer had mentioned that he was going to England on business that might keep him all summer, simultaneous questions struggled to the lips of each lad.

"But if you are going to England, sir, and we cannot consult you from time to time, we had better ask you now if it will be all right for us to invite some friends?"

"Why, I rather thought," said Mr. Pennington, with a twinkle, "that you might care to have some guests in Maine."

"I think there will be no difficulty about that," smiled the doctor. "By the way, I hear that five of you lads are rather closely associated—very closely, I might say."

There was a suspicious twinkle in his eye as he thought of numerous escapades in which the Dacre boys, together with Beetle McIntyre, Fred Beeton, and Sandy MacTavish had been, by report, associated.

After some more details had been discussed, the boys were notified that they could return to their school work and would be informed later

of the arrangements made for their trip to the "Pine Tree State."

They left the room with dancing eyes and light hearts. They saw opening out before them a wonderful summer. Though of the adventures that were to befall them neither of the lads at the moment dreamed. Had they possessed the gift of looking into the future—but, then, nobody has that faculty; which perhaps is just as well.

Hastening along the corridor to the class-room in which they were to take their algebra examination, the boys encountered Beetle McIntyre, hastening toward his ordeal in Latin.

"Well," demanded the other lad, noting that the boys had come from the direction of the doctor's study, "are we all in bad on this, or just you two?"

"On what?" asked Tom and Jack, assuming looks of blankness.

"Oh, come off your perches—about last night, of course. You've been to see the doctor, and——"

"Mr. McIntyre," said Tom, in a haughty tone

to the astonished McIntyre, "we are now landed proprietors; please form your remarks toward us accordingly—in intelligible language."

The boys passed on toward their destination, while the Beetle gazed after them with wide eyes. His astonishment, however, was nothing to that which later ran through the school at the news of the Dacre boys' good fortune.

CHAPTER III

FUN AT AUDUBON

The boys' adventure with the two German professors did not, as they had feared, have any serious results, and all three passed in German with flying colors. Perhaps Professor Tindelbaum, despite his threat to unravel the matter, decided it would be more dignified to pass it by. At any rate, nothing more was heard of it, and he readily agreed to spend his vacation in Maine as a sort of guardian of the boys; although he confessed to having misgivings as to the results. The fact that his salary was to continue during his stay in Maine, however, decided him to risk what he felt was equivalent to the daring of a lion tamer entering a cage of ravening beasts.

Following the announcement of their good fortune, the boys and their allies of the Phrantic

Phive seemed to become possessed of a streak of energy and good behavior that to any one familiar with boys was as a calm before a storm. Sandy MacTavish, as the boys had anticipated, had not hesitated a minute between spending his vacation in bonny Scotland with his maiden aunts, and going to Maine with the Dacre boys. The Beetle and the Living Skeleton were almost frantic at the idea of not being able to come along, but promised to try to join the party later.

So things stood, one hot afternoon three days before vacation, when Tom and Jack Dacre and Sandy MacTavish lay beneath a shady maple tree, some distance from the school, discussing their plans. They had ridden out on motor cycles, which all three possessed, and which represented much saving, and self-denial of candy and sodas.

"Only three days more," exclaimed Sandy, chucking the core of an apple at a chipmunk that, having heard no words for a space of time, had poked its nose over a stone wall opposite; "say, we ought to *do* something."

"Go out in a blaze of glory, you mean?" inquired Tom.

"That's the idea. Make ourselves famous. Go ringing down the corridors of time."

"Go ringing into the corridors of trouble, I guess you mean," amended Jack Dacre. "I guess we've had enough fun this term—leave your plan over till next."

"Well, while I was eating that apple I thought of something so good that it's a shame to postpone it," said Sandy.

"Well, let's hear it," demanded Tom. "If you can think in this heat you've got a remarkable brain, and ought to be capable of figuring out a wonderful scheme of some kind. Who's this joke to be on?"

"On M. Jamais," exclaimed Sandy, with a chuckle. "We've let him alone a lot this term, and he'll be feeling lonesome if we don't pay him some attention; and this plan of mine is a stem-winder."

"Well, get it out of your system," demanded

Jack. "Stop boosting yourself, and let's hear your plan of campaign."

M. Jamais was the French professor at Audubon, and was a tall, thin, nervous Gaul, among whose peculiarities was the wearing of a bright chestnut wig. So bright was it, in fact, that it verged on being carrotty, and there was a tradition among the boys that the head-covering had been made from the locks of a ruddy-headed sweetheart of the Frenchman, who was noted for his attention to the fair sex.

Shouts of laughter greeted the gratified Sandy as he got through detailing his plan for the discomfiture of the unfortunate son of La Belle France.

"Great! Queer how the Scotch can do such splendid thinking on oatmeal."

"The very thing."

"We'll do it to-night."

These were among the enthusiastic comments of the two Dacres, who, unwilling as they had at first been to enter into Sandy's plan, now found

it too promising of magnificent results to remain out of it.

No time was lost after this in hastening back to the school, where the Scotch boy's scheme was hastily detailed to the other members of the Phrantic Phive. That evening five figures stole across the campus to some bushes opposite a lighted window on the ground floor of the faculty building. The dulcet notes of a flute proceeding thence announced that Professor Jamais was indulging in a little recreation at his favorite pursuit.

Sandy and the Beetle, who had volunteered to precede the others as pioneers, soon crept back to the clump of bushes behind which the rest had secreted themselves, and announced that all was not yet ready.

"He's still got it on," they reported, "but he's shed his slippers and coat, and that will be the next to go, sure."

For half an hour the wailing of Professor Jamais' flute continued, and then it ceased abruptly, while the figure of the French professor

was seen to cross the room and hang something on a nail near the window. Shortly after that his light was extinguished, as the professor retired early. After a brief interval, the scouts once more crept toward the window. On their return they reported "snores" and declared the time was ripe for action.

"Sure you've got it located?" demanded Tom.

"Could put my hand on it blindfolded," responded the Beetle easily. On receipt of this assurance they all stole across the now deserted campus.

At the window the Beetle, as he was the tallest and lightest, was hoisted on Jack's shoulders. After a minute's feeling about inside the open sash, he grabbed something hanging inside and jumped lightly down. As he did so, however, his feet scraped the wall loudly, and instantly from inside the professor's room arose a terrific yapping and barking.

"It's that confounded dog of his," exclaimed Tom in a whisper; "run for your lives, boys."

As they ran they heard the professor's querulous tones behind them.

"Si-lence, Napoleon! Mauvais chien! Silence. What ees eet zat you 'ear?"

The boys, crouched in a dark doorway, heard the professor get out of bed and come to the window.

"Hope he doesn't strike a light and notice it's gone. He'll rouse the whole school," breathed Tom.

"No danger," chuckled Sandy; "hear him now."

The professor was muttering angrily to himself.

"Nom d'un nom de chien. Zee dog ees crazee. Here," the boys heard him open a door leading to the campus, "get out into zee night, Nap-ol-eon, you dees-turb my sleep. A bas Nap-ol-eon!"

The boys, convulsed with laughter, heard the door bang and a brief whine of protest from Napoleon. Then came a patter of feet as the dog ran sniffing along, trying to find some entrance to the school building.

"Hoot-toots, fellows, another idea!" exclaimed Sandy, as the dog drew nearer.

"Don't drop it, you wild Highlander, it might explode," laughed Tom.

"Nay, this is better than the tither ane. Leesten; we'll catch Napoleon, and——"

"Well, tell the whole school about it," grunted the Beetle, as Sandy's shrill tones rose high under his inspiration.

The other cautiously sank his voice till it was almost inaudible. As a result, Napoleon was lured to the boys' retreat, which, as he was a friendly dog, was not difficult, and promptly captured. When last seen that night, the professor's dog was tied to the leg of a chair in the inventive Sandy's room.

At chapel next morning when the boys and the faculty assembled, the only professor not present was the instructor of French. Doctor Parsons, noting his absence, and not having received word that he was indisposed, sent at once to Professor Jamais' room to find out what, if anything, was the matter. The messenger returned in an ex-

traordinary condition. He could hardly speak for suppressed giggles; but finally, under the doctor's stern eye, the emissary, a small boy named Dobson, sputtered out:

"I-I-It's his wig, sir."

"What, sir?" demanded the doctor, in his most awful tones; "no levity with me, sir; what do you mean?"

"What I said, sir, please, sir," repeated young Dobson; "it's his wig, sir. He can't find it, sir, and says he would rather come before you unclothed than without it."

Noticing a suspicious tendency to mirth among those about him, the doctor strode from the chapel with a curt nod and a "that will do" to Dobson. As that afternoon was to witness the final exercises and presentation of awards and diplomas, the morning hours were spent in only desultory study. At noon the Phrantic Phive met in a secluded corner of the campus. A business session, the Beetle termed it.

"How is he—hungry?" asked the Living Skeleton, one of whose peculiarities was that he could

eat more and show it less than any boy at Audubon.

"Hungry?" echoed Sandy. "Gentlemen, I'll gie you my word that that canine has devoured two volumes of Cæsar's Commentaries."

"I'll bet they give him indigestion," spoke Jack.

"That's a sure sign of hunger," said Tom; "do you reckon that the professor will appear this afternoon?"

"I pr-r-resume from the doctor's manner as he left the chapel, he will," grinned Sandy, going off into bursts of laughter.

The presentations of prizes and diplomas took place in the great hall of the school, which, as the hour for the exercises drew near, was crowded with relatives and friends of the boys. The honored guests, the faculty and the prize-winners, among whom were the boys, were seated on the platform beneath the pipe-organ at one end of the hall, while the body of the place was occupied by the remainder of the audience.

"He's here," whispered Tom to Jack, as they

filed up onto the platform; "and, oh, my aunt's cat's whiskers! look at him!"

At the same time the eyes of the other members of the Phrantic Phive fell on the French professor. He did, indeed, present an extraordinary sight. Shorn of his usually redundant locks, his head was as polished and bare of hair as a billiard ball. To add to the wigless one's discomfiture, a ray of afternoon sunlight fell full on his unadorned dome, as if to illuminate it. What the doctor had said to the professor the boys did not, of course, know, but the fact that he was there without his wig proved that he was present under orders—not otherwise would he have undergone the ordeal.

To those not familiar with the French professor's everyday appearance, he did not, of course, look so ludicrous; but to the faculty and the school it was a hard task to preserve gravity in the face of the professor's shorn headpiece.

Suddenly, when the exercises were half completed and the doctor was announcing in solemn

tones a welcome to the visitors, an extraordinary interruption occurred.

"The youth assembled here this afternoon is on the threshold of opportunity," the doctor intoned. "On this solemn occasion we——"

"Yap-yap-yap!"

"I said that we——"

"Yap-yap-yap!"

The noise came from outside the hall, but was drawing nearer. Some of the audience began to giggle. The Phrantic Phive dared not exchange glances. If they had they must have rolled off the platform in spasms of unextinguishable mirth.

"See what that interruption is," whispered the doctor, turning to a boy who sat just behind him, and making a fresh start. But even as he framed the first words, through the great doors at the back of the hall burst Napoleon, wagging his tail frantically and uttering glad "yaps" of recognition, as his eyes fell on his horrified master.

But what was that perched jauntily on Napoleon's white and woolly head?

The audience looked, and were thrown into

convulsions of mirth that nothing could still. As for the boys, they shrieked with laughter in spite of frantic cries from the faculty for "Silence."

The Phrantic Phive had accomplished their masterpiece.

As Napoleon leaped onto the platform and, all unconscious of the sensation he created, pawed joyously at his bald-headed master, it was clearly seen that tied to his head was a RED WIG!

"And all it cost, besides expenditure of brain power, was a bit o' siller to the janitor's boy to hold the creetur ootside till I gave the signal," chuckled Sandy, under cover of the uproar.

CHAPTER IV

A CONFUSION OF LUNCHESES

Had the "Episode of the Red Wig and The White Poodle," as it was destined to become known in the school annals, occurred at any other time than the close of the term, it is likely that there would have been a rigid investigation and severe punishment for those engaging in it—if they had been caught. Coming as it did, however, at the close of the commencement exercises, which, incidentally, broke up rather more abruptly than usual on that account, there was no time to trace the culprits, although the victim of Sandy's inspiration threatened all kinds of dire vengeance on the authors of his confusion.

He sought out the doctor, and although, of course, what took place at that interview is not known, there is reason to believe that the head

of the school advised the irate professor to regard it in the light of a prank—outrageous, it is true—but still a prank. At any rate, the boys heard no more of it. The day after commencement was a day of confusion. Boys rushed hither and thither packing and saying hasty good-byes. Grand marches about the campus were organized and carried out, and all sorts of farewell jests and capers indulged in by the young spirits who had just been set free from school cares for a whole summer.

But while everybody else in the school was indulging in gleeful celebration of the closing of the term, the Beetle and the Living Skeleton were prowling about morosely. They had promised to join the other members of the Phrantic Phive in Maine, if they could obtain their parents' permission, of which they had little doubt, but in the meantime it pleased them little to be separated, for even a brief interval, from their fun-loving chums.

In this mood they sought a sort of lunch-counter and ice-cream place in the village, seeking to

drown their gloom in succulent sodas. They were indulging in these dainties with a recklessness that made it apparent that they were disposing of the remainder of their term's allowance, when their attention was attracted to the lunch-counter by the simultaneous entrance of a flashily-dressed boy with a bulldog, and the instructor of German. The latter greeted the boys and then headed for the lunch counter and gave his order. He requested that a lunch, consisting of bologna, pickles, and other German delicacies be put up in a box for him and sent to his quarters at the school by messenger.

"I'm afraid dot I mighd get hungry by der train," he explained as he paid for it.

"Say, Shorty," said the youth who had led in the bulldog, addressing the lunch-counter man, as soon as the professor had left, "put me up something for the dog, will you? I've got a long trip home ahead of me, and he'll be hungry before we get there."

"That's Sport Spencer," whispered the Beetle, shoveling down a pink spoonful; "hullo, Sport."

"Hullo, kid," rejoined the Sport loftily, "gorging yourselves?"

"Sure; have some? I'll blow," volunteered the Beetle, with magnificent liberality.

"No, thanks, I've outgrown that girlish stuff," remarked the other. "Say, Shorty, hurry that up, will you? Just some dog biscuit and bones ull do."

"Tell you what, Spencer," suggested Shorty, "you needn't bother to wait if you are in a hurry. Professor Tindelbaum is having his package sent up to the school. I'll send your dog's lunch along at the same time."

"All right, thanks," rejoined Spencer. "I've got a lot of packing to do. Come on, Bruiser. So long, kids. Say," he suddenly remarked, pausing at the door, "don't get those two packages mixed, will you? I'd hate to feed my dog on German lunch."

A few minutes later the Beetle and his companion were fain to admit that they could hold no more, not even a wafer.

"Better put some in your pocket," suggested

the Beetle, running a predatory hand into the wafer-bowl, after a prudent look to see if Shorty was hovering in the vicinity. The Living Skeleton followed his example.

“Say, you’ll get fat some day, and then your peculiar style of beauty will be ruined,” grinned the Beetle, as he gazed at the liberal toll the bony youth levied on the wafer bowl.

“Say, boys!” hailed a voice from the back of the shop suddenly.

It was Shorty.

“Nailed with the goods!” exclaimed the Skeleton, against whose fragile frame the pocketful of wafers stood out like bumps on a log.

But the usually alert Shorty had not witnessed the attack on the wafer receptacle. He wanted the boys for another purpose, and emerged from the regions behind the shop carrying two packages.

“Will you take these up to the school?” he inquired. “That errand boy’s disappeared again, and they are to be delivered in a hurry.”

"Sure we will," responded the Beetle cheerfully, "anything we can do for you, Shorty."

He punched his companion playfully in the wafer pocket.

"Now be careful," warned Shorty, "one package is for Spencer's dog, and the other is for Professor Tindelbaum."

"All right; we won't get 'em mixed," promised the Beetle, as the two companions hastened from the shop, so as to be clear of danger before Shorty discovered the alarming condition of low water among the wafers.

Halfway back to the school the Beetle's look of gloom vanished. His face lit up with a beatific smile.

"Say, Skelly," he breathed, "I've an inspiration."

"Well, don't swallow it. You've had enough ice-cream soda as it is, without absorbing anything like that," snorted the angular Skeleton, hastening along.

"No, but listen." The Beetle laid his hand on his companion's arm.

"Well?"

"Say, those two boxes *do* look alike, don't they?"

"They certainly do."

"We must be very careful not to get them mixed, mustn't we? I say we must be very careful."

"What are you driving at?" impatiently shot out the Skeleton, nibbling at a wafer, now that they had traversed a safe distance.

"What a dreadful thing it would be," remarked the Beetle, gazing ahead of him at the Hudson River and the soft blue highlands beyond, in an abstracted way, "what a dreadful thing it would be if we mixed 'em."

The two boys exchanged significant glances, and then burst into a roar of laughter.

"We'll do it," they exclaimed in chorus.

And so it came about that two hours later, as the professor and his young charges were speeding to New York—having crossed the river on the ferry and taken the New York Central—the

instructor in the German language received a shock.

Before saying good bye the Beetle and the Skeleton, divided between gloom and laughter, had confided the joke to Tom and Jack Dacre and Sandy. As the train passed Fishkill Sandy took occasion to murmur absently:

"Oh, I'm so hungry, professor. I was so excited that I forgot to eat before I left the school. Did I hear you mention something about lunch before we started?"

"Ach!" beamed the professor, "see vat it iss to have a fore-legged—I mean a fore-sighted mind alretty. Ya, MacTavish, dot is lunch. Und vee haf a bide of him—hein?"

Sandy, favoring Tom and Jack, who sat on the opposite seat, with a portentous wink watched the opening of the box with interest. An instant later a wail of anguish from the professor rang through the car.

"Good gracious, professor, what is the matter?" exclaimed Tom.

"Look! look!" almost hysterically wailed the

German, extending the open box; "voss iss diss, voss iss it?"

"Looks like dog-biscuit and bones," said Jack gravely; "have you gone in for a back-to-nature diet, professor?"

"Donner und blitzen," sputtered the German, "if I didt not know you poys could not haf done diss, I would have t'ought it voss you. But I know you vos by der school till vee leave dere. Ah, I haf id," he exclaimed suddenly, "is vos dot Shordy—as you call him—by der lunch-room. Led him loog ouid ven I gedt back. I'll have him arrested as sure as der iss a kaiser."

CHAPTER V

ALL NOT GOLD THAT GLITTERS

While the professor was still grumbling over his disappointment and the boys were all afflicted with sudden and inexplicable fits of coughing, the train came to a stop at a station below Fishkill, and a somewhat flashily dressed man got on. The car was crowded, and an inside seat, opposite the professor and the boys, was the only one available. The newcomer sank into this, puffing as if he had had a rush to make the train.

That this was the case seemed to be evidenced a few seconds later, when the conductor came through collecting tickets.

"Ticket," he demanded of the newcomer.

"Oh," exclaimed the man, as if just recalled to himself, "I'll have to buy one from you. I was in such a hurry I didn't have time to get one."

"All right. Be as quick as you can, please," said the conductor, tearing off and punching a "train ticket"; "where to, please?"

"New York," rejoined the other, drawing out a roll of bills and peeling off a five-dollar certificate, "and can you tell me if we get into the Grand Central in time to make connections for the train which connects with the Bangor Mail?"

"Sure," responded the conductor; "you'll have to hustle to make it, though. Hullo, I've no change for a five-dollar bill. Anything smaller?"

The man shook his head.

"I've der change got," volunteered the professor, taking the bill from the conductor and handing back the required coin. The man across the aisle thanked him profusely.

"You are not afraid of counterfeits, I see," he said laughingly.

"Nein. I can tell a counterfeit as far as you can see him," responded the professor easily, putting the bill in his pocket.

A short time later the train rolled into the Grand Central, and the professor and the boys,

carrying their suit-cases and small baggage, left the car.

"Now I gedt me a bite to ead, ain'd id?" observed the professor, heading for the lunch counter.

The boys did not care to eat, so they amused themselves looking about the station and experimenting with the various slot machines. When they judged it was time to go back to the professor they sauntered toward the restaurant. As they neared it they heard a loud voice declaiming and a shout for the police followed.

"Hullo, something's the matter," exclaimed Tom; "come on, boys, let's see what the trouble is."

They elbowed through the fast gathering crowd about the restaurant door, and on entering were amazed to find the professor held tightly in the grip of a waiter, while the proprietor of the place was shouting for the police.

"What's the matter here?" demanded Tom; "this gentleman is in charge of our party."

"Oh, tank heffens you haf come!" exclaimed

the professor, almost in tears; "dey say dey haf me arrested. Oh, der disgrace. Himmel! vot I shall do?"

The poor man almost broke down and wept.

"This man offered a five-dollar bill in payment for his lunch which was as rank a counterfeit as I ever saw," explained the cashier, somewhat more civil now that he saw the professor had friends.

"Which, the bill or the lunch?" inquired Tom.

"Id voss der pill I gedt on der train!" moaned the professor.

"That's what they all say," was the response; "that's the third five-dollar counterfeit we've had in a week. There must be a gang of you fellows."

And now a policeman came bustling up, with the importance peculiar to his kind when there is a crowd to be overawed.

"Phwat's all this?" he demanded, pushing the boys aside.

"Why, this gentleman here, Professor Tindelbaum, of Audubon College, is accused of trying to pass counterfeit money," volunteered Tom.

"Of course, officer, the charge is absurd. He got the bill on the train from a slick stranger, who asked the conductor for change. When he couldn't give it him, the man got the professor to change the bill."

"That's a likely story," sneered the policeman. "I guess you are one of the gang, too. I'd like to see the conductor you spoke of——"

"And here he is," spoke a voice from the rear, and to the boys' unspeakable delight the conductor of their train came through the crowd. "I've been looking for these boys and that gentleman. I was told after that man who gave them the bill left the train that he was the same who had offered several counterfeits of the same character recently."

"Oh, well, then if no one wants to make a charge," said the policeman disgustedly.

The restaurant man said he was satisfied if his bill was paid in good money, and the officer, indignantly muttering, left the station. After thanking the conductor for his timely aid, the boys and the professor left, also, to go to the steamship

office where they were to buy tickets for Bangor, from whence they would go by rail to their destination. As they left the waiting-room a man darted by them, running toward the platform.

"There he goes!" yelled Tom, darting after him.

"Who?" asked Jack, sprinting by his side. "What's the matter with you?"

"The man who gave the counterfeit bill to the professor. Hey, there! stop thief!"

"All ab-o-oard!" came a cry from the train platform.

The boys' quarry darted between two iron gates as they clanged shut, and swung onto the end of a moving train. They were too late.

"There's one thing—I'll recognize that chap if I ever see him again," said Tom, as the boys hurried, disappointed, away.

A little more than two days later the queer little train that puffs along the rusty tracks of the railroad branch leading to Norton Cross Roads, in Maine, deposited at that station the pro-

fessor and his charges, including Jasper, who had joined them in New York, and whose trip as far as Bangor had been a nightmare of seasickness, and after that a nightmare of baggage. Now, however, while the professor and the three lads gazed curiously about them at their new surroundings, the colored man surveyed the pile of baggage deposited by the train with unmingled satisfaction. Despite his fears to the contrary, it was all there, down to the last fishing-rod case and Tom Dacre's beloved phonograph, on which still reposed the "Beware" record.

"Looks like a Scotch tailor's-goose with an unco' big fire in it," was Sandy's parting insult to the wheezy locomotive. Further uncomplimentary comment was cut short by the issuance from the freight shed of the depot of Jared Fogg, the station master. He was angular, leathery-skinned, and had a gray tufted chin. A true son of the Maine wilds was Jared. The expression on his wizened features, as he regarded the travelers, was one of unmingled amazement, as well it might have been, for Norton's Cross Roads

and its vicinity lay far from the beaten track of summer visitors and in the heart of as wild a stretch of country as there is left in Maine to-day.

The Cross Roads itself consisted of a tumble-down hotel, a small church—opened once a month—the station master's house, a blacksmith shop, the blacksmith's house and two or three other frame dwellings. These were stretched in a formal row, across the road from the station, against a background of dark, dense pine woods. The main road went over a hill brow in either direction, while a track leading east and west among the timber and intersecting it at right angles gave the station its name. There were two trains a day—one down and one up. The down train puffed down to the junction of the main line, thirty miles below, in the early morning and the up train puffed up the long, heavy grade in the afternoon, arriving at the Cross Roads at about four o'clock.

Besides the boys' belongings, there had been dumped from the baggage car by the departed afternoon train two wooden boxes with iron cor-

ners, which seemed to be of unusual weight. At any rate, it had taken two men to lift them from the train.

As the boys and the professor stood looking about them, an owner for the two weighty pieces of baggage appeared, in the person of as singular-looking an individual as any of the party had ever set eyes on.

Down the road in a cloud of dust—for it had been an unusually dry spring and summer—a buckboard drawn by two fast horses had appeared as the train pulled out.

On the seat was ensconced a tall man, with big, slouchy shoulders and a general appearance of muscular strength, who was dressed in typical backwoods garb. Blue lumberman's shirt, corduroy trousers, hunting boots, a battered hat and broad, leather belt. His chief claim to being remarkable, however, lay in his beard. It was thick and black, and fell almost to his waist. But it was its upper extremity that rendered the whole man noteworthy, and gave him a peculiar, even an alarming, expression. The hirsute growth

came up his cheeks almost to a level with his eyes—two piercing orbs which gazed sharply at the group of strangers.

“It’s like a mask!” exclaimed Tom, as he gazed. The man drew up his team in front of the station so sharply as almost to throw them on their haunches.

“Hey, there, station-master,” hailed the newcomer, in a gruff voice, “any boxes for me on the train?”

“Yep,” was the response; “two—jes as big, and seem ter be jes’ as heavy as them others you’ve bin gittin’.”

“Never you mind what I’ve been getting,” growled the bearded man, with a sharp glance at the group of strangers, as if to satisfy himself whether they were listening or not, “load ’em on, and hurry up.”

“You’ll have ter give me ’er hand,” grunted the station-master; “las’ time I loaded such boxes on fer yer I most bruk me back. It’s bin stiff ever sence.”

“How in thunder can I leave this team of

colts?" grunted the other. Before the station-master could make any reply the obliging Jasper hurried forward.

"Ah'll gib yo'-all a hand dar, Misto Station-masto'," he volunteered.

"Will yer? Now, thet's good of yer," smiled the railroad official, who was station-master, operator, baggageman and porter all in one. "Some folks," with a withering glance at the man in the buckboard, "is so partic'lar thet they's scairt of heftin' a thing."

Half dragging and half lifting the first box, the two men, with a combined effort, swung it up on the back of the rig. Then came the second box, but this time things did not go so smoothly. Jasper's foot slipped as he gave a mighty heave, and he crashed to the platform. The box fell, too, and landed on one of its corners. As it struck the platform the lid burst open and what seemed to be several little cubes of shining metal—almost as bright as polished silver—rolled out.

The last of them had not stopped its rolling before the black-bearded man bounded from his

seat and fell on his hands and knees, gathering them up.

"You clumsy, black-skinned idiot," he growled at the crestfallen Jasper.

"Lawd! what's Ah done?" wailed the negro, picking himself up.

In the meantime the team had been utterly forgotten, while their driver, apparently angered beyond measure by the accident, crawled about picking up the metal cubes. He stuffed them quickly into his pockets as fast as he reclaimed them.

"What am dem, misto—silber?" inquired Jasper innocently, "or jes laid (lead)? Dey's pow'ful heaby."

He picked one up in his hand and weighted it attentively. Like a flash the black-bearded man was upon him. With one stroke of his hand he dashed the bit of metal from the negro's hand, and the next instant caught him a blow that knocked him flat on the depot platform for the second time.

Before any of the boys could protest against

this uncalled-for conduct, there was a sudden shout from the professor.

The horses, restive at once when the controlling hand had been removed from the reins, had become alarmed beyond measure at the sound of the impact of the blow. With wild snorts they dashed off down the main road at breakneck speed.

Uncontrolled as they were—no, not uncontrolled, for as they leaped forward, maddened with fear, Tom Dacre had swung himself onto the rear of the buckboard and was now tugging with might and main on the reins.

CHAPTER VI

TOM DACRE, A HERO

Tom Dacre had leaped onto the buckboard as the colts started, more by instinct than anything else. He had no idea of the nature of the animals drawing the plunging vehicle on which he stood, or of the road that lay in front of him. In the west boys as well as men are taught to act first and think afterward in an emergency. Tom, in his plucky act, had been true to his training.

The position in which Tom now found himself was risky enough, however. He was standing upright behind the seat of the buckboard, straining with might and main to check the two runaways, which were bearing him at a terrific pace toward the crest of a hill, beyond which lay he knew not what perils. 'Tug at the runaways'

mouths as he would, Tom soon realized that he could not check them. Nor did sawing at the reins have any more effect. The frightened animals had the bits between their teeth, and he was powerless.

In no time at all, it seemed, they had reached the brow of the hill, and before them on the other side lay a long stretch of road, slightly dipping downward as it went. To Tom's intense relief, there was nothing ahead of him, and if all went well he was confident that the runaways would soon tire themselves out. About a quarter of a mile ahead, however, the road took a turn. If from round that turn a vehicle should suddenly materialize——

Well, Tom didn't want to dwell upon that.

He went grimly to his task again, and this time his powerful muscles, hardened by ranch life, and further trained on the diamond and gridiron, succeeded in appreciably decreasing the speed of the runaways. He had **tugged** the bits from between their teeth, and in a few minutes he was confident he would stop them, when——

Round the curve there suddenly appeared a top-buggy.

In it was seated the sole occupant—a little girl, not more than six years old.

Tom's blood almost froze with horror. He threw all his strength into a final tug on the reins to avert the calamity that seemed certain. As he did so there was a sharp "Crack!" and one of the reins snapped in his grip.

With the child's terrified scream ringing in his ears, Tom felt a terrific crash and heard a sound of grinding, shattering wood and splintering wheels. The next instant he was impelled through the air as helplessly as if from a catapult. Something seemed to strike him a terrific blow, and then all grew black.

"He's all right; only a slight cut in the head."

The boy heard the words as if they had been voiced in a dream. A moment later, however, he opened his eyes and found himself lying on a bed in a room he felt certain he had never seen before. Over him were bending the anxious faces of the

professor, Jack, and Sandy. Jasper, like a black spirit of suspense, hovered in the background with a huge bottle of arnica, most of which he had spilled on the carpet.

"Dat chile boy am killed fo' sho'," he kept moaning.

Suddenly it all came back to Tom—the sense of the collision, the scream, and then the darkness. He hardly dared to ask the question that framed itself.

"The little girl—is—is she all right?"

"Sound as a dollar, thanks to your grit," came from a deep voice somewhere in the rear of the room; "but she won't go gathering strawberries alone again in a hurry."

"But the line broke, and——"

"Not before you had steered the runaways into a bank. They just grazed the other buggy, and that's all," explained the same deep voice, as a tall, stoutly built man came forward. "You're all right, my boy, and any time Mark Ingalls can do anything for you, let him know."

"Mark Ingalls; that's the name over the black-

smith shop," exclaimed Tom, who was now able to sit up, and, except for the pain of a slight cut over his left eye, felt all right.

"That's right, and I'm the man," was the response, "and here's my little girl to thank you herself."

He motioned to the child, who came forward shyly. Going up to Tom and spreading her fingers before her face, she said decidedly:

"You nice boy. May like you."

"That's all right, May," laughed Tom, almost as bashfully as the child herself had spoken; "but where am I now?"

"In my house, where you'll have ter stay till ter-morrer mornin'," volunteered Jared Fogg, coming forward.

"What about that other rig—the one I was on; all smashed to pieces, I suppose?" asked Tom.

"No, except for a pretty bad splintering of the rear wheels and a broken pole, it came out of the smash-up in good shape," volunteered Jack. "They fixed it up, and as the horses were unhurt—they stopped running after you pulled them into

the bank—our excitable friend has driven off with his two mysterious boxes, the cause of all the trouble.”

“Hoot mon! Lucky for him all that excitement happened, or I’d have taken him to task pretty severely for the way he handled poor Jasper,” put in Sandy, doubling up his fist.

“But who was he—any one know?” struck in Jack.

The station-master, who by this time had been apprised of the new arrivals’ identity by the professor, replied:

“Why, he’s to be, in a way, a neighbor of yours,” he said slowly, as if the subject were distasteful to him.

“A neighbor?” echoed the boys.

“I’d rather he voss anyding else,” put in the professor. “Aber he’s vot you call no kind of a neighbor to haf, alretty.”

“What do you mean, Jared?” struck in the blacksmith, in his deep voice. “I thought these kids were campers?”

“No, they’re going to occupy old Chisholm

Dacre's bungalow. 'They're his nephews and heirs,' was the reply.

The effect of this information on the blacksmith was strange. He seemed to be about to speak and then, mastering whatever emotion it was possessed him, he remained silent.

He gazed moodily at the boys with folded arms, standing back in a dark corner of the room, where his expression could not be seen.

"Dacre's nephews—come to spy on us, I'll bet," he muttered under his breath, "and I've placed myself in their debt."

By the time supper was announced Tom was able to sit up, and had been put in possession of the reason for their stay overnight in the station-master's home. Sawmill Creek, on the headwaters of which, and not far from the west branch of the Penobscot River, their uncle's estate lay, was twenty miles from the Cross Roads, and it would have been impossible to get a rig that night. It had been decided, therefore, to defer the start till the morning. This information was imparted while the boys were assembled in the

stuffy little parlor of Jared Fogg's home awaiting the call to supper.

"But why didn't we put up at the hotel, professor?" inquired Tom.

"Aber—dot hotel iss no hotel alretty," rejoined the professor.

"That's right, Tom," put in Jack; "the station-master told us that some years ago this was a flourishing community, and then the hotel was running full blast. The lumber hereabouts has been pretty well cleaned out now, and nothing remains of it but the relics. By the way, on uncle's place, so Fogg says, there's the remains of an old flume more than two miles long. It was put up years ago to carry lumber to the valley below, when they used to chute logs from the hills to the mills."

"Were our neighbors lumbermen?" inquired Tom. "I mean that one with the hair mattress on his face and the uncertain temper."

"Don't know about him," rejoined Jack. "If he was they must have used him as a buzz-saw or something. I never in my life saw a man go

up in the air so over a busted box. I'd hate to be around him when anything real happened to get on his nerves."

"By the way," wondered Sandy, "I wonder what was in those boxes? Must have been something unco' valuable."

"Well, it wasn't candy—or—or dog biscuits," said Tom, with a mischievous glance at the professor.

Jasper, who had listened with open eyes to the talk, now came forward holding something in his hand.

"Ah done slip dis in mah pocket while dat man wid dose whiskahs and de *bahk* wasn't lookin'," he said, extending one of the glistening cubes on his palm.

Tom took it, while the others eagerly crowded about him.

"What is it?" asked Jack.

"Looks like bonny siller," volunteered Sandy.

"Too heavy for silver," said Tom. "Lend me your knife, Jack."

The knife being forthcoming, the boy opened

it and shaved a sliver off the shining cube. It cut almost as easily as a slab of cheese.

"It's lead, pure lead, that's what it is!" exclaimed the boy wonderingly; "but what on earth does any one want lead shipped in here for?"

"Gie it oop," said Sandy, with a shrug.

"I haf heardt dot dere iss leadt alretty by some of der mountains of Maine," put in the professor.

"Maybe our whiskered friend eats it, and that's what makes his disposition so uncertain and his hand so heavy," suggested Jack.

"I thocht you'd be *led* into that," grinned Sandy, dodging a playful blow from Tom Dacre's brother.

A few moments later supper was announced, and further discussion was temporarily ended. Boys cannot eat and theorize at the same time. Tom, however, slipped the bit of lead into his pocket and assumed a thoughtful expression under his patched-up forehead.

That night as he and Jack were climbing into an old-fashioned bedstead, on the ground floor of Jared Fogg's house, Tom remarked thoughtfully:

"Say, Jack, you remember the leaden key we came to look for?"

"Oh, that pipe-dream," grunted Jack scornfully.

"I'm not so sure about it's being a pipe-dream," was the other lad's thoughtful rejoinder, as he gave the chunk of lead a good-night look. "I've got a sneaking idea in the back of my head that we've got a clue."

"A lead, you mean," snorted Jack, snuggling into the bedclothes, for nights are sharp in that part of Maine, even in the summer.

Tom was the first up in the morning, and gazing out of the open window he saw that it was a glorious morning, with a clean-swept sky overhead and sparkling sunlight all about. Humming a tune in sheer lightness of heart, he was turning from the window to tug the clothes off Jack, who still slumbered—and snored serenely—when he paused with a start.

"I'll swear *that* wasn't there last night," he said to himself.

"That" was a folded piece of paper, pinned into

a crack of the window-pane with a sharpened sliver.

“Some village maiden must have sent us a valentine,” grinned the boy, as he pulled out the sliver and opened the note.

It took him some seconds to decipher the scrawl that met his eyes. Clumsy as the handwriting was, there seemed to have been an attempt to disguise it. As the boy finally made it out, the note ran:

“U & frens kepe orf Dacre’s plaise or luk Owt fer trubil and plenti uv itt.”

CHAPTER VII

A MAN WITH A PATCHED SHOE

"I don't think we'd better say anything to the others just yet."

Such was Jack's advice after Tom had exhibited his early-morning find. "It may be just a joke, and again it may not," he added. "If it is meant in earnest, we'll soon find out, and then _____"

Jack's jaw clicked to with a snap that his friends knew meant trouble.

"I agree with you," assented his brother; "we'll lie low and say nothing; and await events."

"Which incidentally seem to be coming along in pretty rapid succession," commented Jack, finishing his dressing.

Jared Fogg met them outside with the information that he had obtained a rig to carry the trav-

elers, and a heavy wagon for their baggage. They could start immediately after breakfast, he said, and, as the road lay mostly down hill, they should reach Chisholm Dacre's bungalow about noon.

"By the way," said Tom, as the station-master started to shuffle off to his "chores," "in all the excitement of last night we forgot to ask you the name of our black-bearded friend."

"Oh, him," said the station-master; "he's Trulliber—Nate Trulliber."

"I ken you mean Trubbler, don't you?" inquired Sandy, who had just joined the group.

"He is a 'trubbler,' and that's a fact," rejoined the station-master. "Livin' way back of beyond, where he does, there ain't much chance to 'cumulate information 'bout him; but he's what we call 'bad medicine.' Don't nobody seem ter know much 'bout him 'cept that he's guv out onct or twicet that he comes frum down Ban-gor way."

"Has he lived here long?" inquired Tom.

"Come 'bout a year afore your uncle went away on that ship. Took't up a piece of land, in-

cludin' the old buildings of the Keystone Lumber Company, same concern as had the flume below yer uncle's place."

"Does he live alone?" inquired Sandy.

"Nope—not much," laughed the station-master. "He's got a wallopin' big boy, 'bout your size," looking at Tom, "and then there's the boarders."

"The boarders?" asked Tom, in some astonishment.

"Yep; two reg-lar city fellers. You'll see 'em up thar. They spend most o' their time fishin' an' huntin' when it's ther season. I reckon they roam over yer uncle's place quite a bit."

"I guess we'll have to put up some 'no trespassing' signs, then," laughed Tom. "I've no idea of having the creek fished to death on our property. How long have the boarders been there?"

"'Bout six months, I reckon."

"They came in the winter, then. Funny time for boarders."

"Yep. They give out that they had tubby-ter-

lock-us, or some dis-ease uv similar name, an' was here fer their health. Fer sick folks, though, they do a lot of travelin'. Go ter ther city once a month or so."

After a little more conversation the group broke up, Sandy declaring he was going to call the professor from his dreams of the fatherland and Tom linking his arm in Jack's for a before-breakfast stroll.

"Just take a walk with me, old fellow," he said; "there's something I want to look at down the road."

Jack asked no questions. When his elder brother spoke in that tone he knew he had a good reason for his actions. Tom piloted his brother round to a small rose-garden which was beneath the window of their sleeping-room. The earth there had been recently raked and was not burned hard by the sun like the rest of the ground about the house.

"Humph! I thought so," grunted Tom, as he bent over the earth about the foot of the rose-bushes.

"Thought what?" inquired Jack, who had pricked his finger, "that there are thorns on rose-bushes?"

"Never mind the humor," smiled Tom; "but look here."

He indicated the tracks of a rather large foot, near the instep of which was the distinct impress of a large patch.

"Well," said Tom triumphantly, "we've found something. What do you make of *that*?"

"Huh, I don't see much in that. We knew that somebody must have pinned that note to the window, and, unless it was a spook, that somebody must have left a track."

"Jack, I'm surprised at you," said Tom, in a mock-reproachful tone. "Where's your Western training? What do you do if you start out to track an estray from the ranch? What's the first thing you look for?"

"Why," rejoined the younger brother, in a rather puzzled tone, "find out if there's anything queer about his track."

"Correct. Now, look at this track. Notice anything peculiar about it?"

"Of course I do. How stupid of me. That patch."

"Exactly. Our stock of knowledge is now increased by the fact that the man who placed that note there last night has a patch on the instep of the sole of his left shoe, is pretty tall, and wears a rough blue suit."

"Oh, get out."

Jack laughed incredulously at his brother, who had been peering about.

"Moreover, he is left-handed."

"Say, cut out this Sherlock Holmes business, Tom."

"I'll demonstrate, my dear Watson," announced Tom, drawing down the corners of his mouth after the manner of the famous detective and placing one finger to his brow. "He is pretty tall, because that note is pinned a good five feet ten from the ground. He wears blue clothes, or at least clothes with a blue mixture in them,

because here's some blue wool caught on this thorn."

"Oh, that's easy; but what about this left-hand business?" demanded Jack derisively.

"Well, I'll show you that, too, Watson," smiled Tom, dodging a right swing from his brother. "Whoever placed that note there stood facing the window all the time, didn't he? His feet show that. Now, it seems that he carelessly forgot to sharpen the sliver he pinned the note up with, before he came along on his errand. Therefore, he had to sharpen it here—see the shavings?"

He pointed down to several freshly cut slivers which lay on the ground near the footmarks. Jack nodded with a little more respect for his brother's deductions than he had shown hitherto.

"Which side of the footmarks do the shavings lie?"

"To the right side, to be sure."

"Well, my astute brother, if he had stood facing the window, and used his right hand to cut with, the shavings would have fallen to the left, or at least in that direction, wouldn't they? But

as they lie to the right of his footmarks, it's a fair guess that he used the left hand, isn't it?"

"By hookey! you're right. But who is there that we know answers that description? Certainly not our new neighbor, although he seems to have taken a violent objection to one of our party, at least."

"No," remarked Tom musingly, "it's not Nate Trulliber. I have an idea in my head who it is; but we'll wait a while before passing judgment. Hello, there's the professor calling for breakfast. Come on," and both boys hastened into the house.

Immediately after the meal, as Jared Fogg had promised, the big top surrey that was to carry the party, and the spring-wagon in which their baggage was to travel, drew up in front of the station-master's yard, to the boys' unbounded delight. Some little delay was occasioned at the start by the professor's insisting on delving to the very bottom of the pile in a search for his butterfly net and preserving bottles; for he was by way of being quite an amateur naturalist, and

thought that he might be able to secure some rare specimens on the drive.

After driving everybody nearly frantic over the delayed start, the professor, perspiring but triumphant, announced that he had had his paraphernalia out all the time, and the cavalcade began to move slowly forward.

Glancing back, Tom saw the big form of the smith, his little girl at his side, standing in the road behind them and shading his eyes with his hand.

"Good bye, boy! good bye!" the little girl was shouting. Tom waved gaily back, but the smith stood immovable as a figure carved in stone.

Suddenly the surrey came to a halt, and so did the wagon.

"Viss iss los?" demanded the professor.

"The trace is *loose*, ef yer want ter know," said Jared Fogg angrily. "Here, you hold the lines while I get down and fix it." The station-master had left a neighbor to mind the station while he enjoyed the recreation of the drive.

"Und get run away mit? Nein, mein freindt,"

solemnly remarked the professor, shaking his head.

"And yet there's folks say we shouldn't declare war on Germany," grumbled Fogg, looking about him. "Hullo, there's Ingalls," he cried suddenly. "Hey, Ingalls! Ingalls!—whoa, there, mare, whoa!"

The smith came running up.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, nodding shortly to the boys, almost as if they were strangers.

"Tug's loose; fix it, will yer?"

"Sure," said the smith, bending over the leather trace. In a moment he had it adjusted and stood aside while the restive team plunged forward.

"See that?" whispered Tom excitedly, as they trotted over the hill crest and round the curve where he had encountered his adventure of the day before.

"What?" demanded Jack, somewhat astonished at his brother's excited tone.

"He fixed that trace with his left hand," whispered Tom.

“What, you don’t mean that you suspect——”

“I don’t know what to think.”

“It’s absurd. After you saved his daughter’s life, too. Why, no man alive in his situation would be guilty of such ingratitude as to become your enemy.”

“Hum,” muttered Tom, as they drove on, “just the same, I wish I could have got a good look at that track of his left shoe.”

CHAPTER VIII

TAKING POSSESSION

“You can see ther place frum here.”

Jared Fogg checked his horses at a rocky rise of the road and pointed, from the height to which they had climbed, down into a small valley. Pines, cedars, and spruce clad its sides thickly up as far as the rocky eminence on which the team had halted. The sweet resinous incense of the Northern woods was in the air. The boys breathed the aroma in delightedly.

Below them the travellers could catch through the trees a glimmer of a lake. On its near bank they were able to glimpse a patch or two of green, which Jared said was the roof of the bungalow.

“A few rods farther, now, an’ you’ll be on your own property,” he said. “Geddap.”

The boys exchanged delighted glances as their leathery-visaged driver spoke.

"Now, dinna swell oop wi' pride," warned Sandy. "Hoot mon, but it's a fine piece of land you have here. 'Twould make a bonny links."

"We don't hev many of them aroun' here now," interjected Jared, who had only caught the last words; "they're scarce as hen's teeth, is lynxes."

"He doesn't mean a lynx—he means a links, where they play golf, you know," explained Tom lucidly.

"Wall, you may play goff, er whatever you call it, with a lynx; but a lynx 'ull play old Harry with you while yer doin' it," responded Jared. "Geddap, mare! Ever hear 'bout how Todd Talmadge caught a lynx not fur frum here? Todd wuz huntin' with Jess Doller, an' ther two become separated. Pritty soon Jess he hearn Todd a-hollerin' ter beat ole Scratch.

"'What ails yer, Todd?' hollers Jess.

"'I've cotched a cat-a-mount,' yells Todd; 'what'll I do?'

"'Hol' onter him,' yells Jess; 'I'll be thar.'

“‘It ain’t that,’ Todd, he squalls; ‘haow in blazes am I goin’ ter let him go? Thet’s what I want ter know.’”

Jared might have been about to tell the boys of the solution of Todd’s problem, but at that moment an incident occurred that set the horses plunging like wild things. It took all the old man’s skill to keep them from turning off short and snapping the pole.

The bushes ahead of them had parted suddenly, and an unkempt, barefooted figure darted across the road. So far as the boys could tell, in the excitement and suddenness incident to its appearance, it wore only a pair of tattered overalls and a rough shirt, as badly in need of repairs as the nether garments. But whether it was man or overgrown boy was impossible to decide, owing to the fleeting glimpse they had caught of it.

“Consarn it all,” muttered Jared, as he quieted his horses down, “thet’s enough to scar’ any horse out of ten years’ growth, jumpin’ up under thar noses like a cotton-tail.”

"W-w-what was dat, Massa Logg?" stuttered Jasper, much alarmed. "W-was it a h'ant?"

"Looked ter me like one of them pesky Trullibers," rejoined Fogg, "an', as we're on your land by this time, boys, you'd a right ter hev him hauled up fer trespassin'."

"That is if we could have caught him," laughed Tom. "Queer, though. It looks almost as if he might have been watching at the side of the road for our arrival."

"Whist! thocht it was a bogle like thim that tuk after Tam O' Shanter," exclaimed Sandy, in an awed tone, which set all the others into a roar of laughter.

Fifteen minutes more of driving brought the boys, with a sudden turn of the steeply inclined road, into full view of their domain. A gasp of delighted surprise broke from their lips as they gazed.

Back of the bungalow thick pine woods grew, clothing the hillside, that sloped up steeply from the small lake, with dark, mysterious green shadows. The bungalow itself stood in a small clear-

ing almost on the water's edge, and was a long, low house of rough logs, with a green shingled roof. At each end was a chimney of rough stone. A short distance from the bungalow was a barn and two or three outbuildings.

A path led from the house to the lakeside, ending in a small wharf, on which lay two canoes and a bateau. The lake itself formed a sort of natural punch-bowl, rimmed on the opposite side by high walls of rock, almost bare of vegetation or timber. At the upper end of the lake, which was about a mile and a half long and three-quarters of a mile wide at its greatest width, Saw Mill Creek flowed over its rocky bed into the mirror-like sheet of water.

At the other end of the little lake, below the bungalow, the enclosed body of water had formerly emptied into a flume. This "spillway" was the one to which Jared had referred as being long in disuse. The waters of the lake now found a natural overflow into another spillway, built when the flume went out of operation. But even with this relief the lake had "backed up" till its

waters were level with the top of the half-natural, half-artificial dam that formed it.

"Three cheers for the Bungalow Boys!" shouted Tom, as Jared drew rein before the bungalow, the path to which had become moss-grown even in the short time it had remained untrodden.

"And for the Leaden Key," whispered Jack, half to himself, "whatever it may be."

The cheers rang out lustily and echoed from the rocky walls on the opposite side of the lake back against the slope behind the house, and then went ringing off in weird cadence up the little valley down which the Saw Mill Creek found its way.

As the cheers died away the absolute silence that had marked the place when the sound of wheels first broke in on it settled down again. Although it was high noon, the surroundings were as silent as a graveyard. The low murmur of the wind in the tops of the tall pines that screened the bungalow only served to accent the quietude. The lake lay without a ripple, quietly

mirroring in its depths its primitive surroundings.

Of this, however, the boys took little notice. The place was soon ringing with shouts and merry remarks, as Tom, armed with the key which Mr. Pennington had given him in New York, opened up the untenanted bungalow. As the lawyer had said, it was furnished with some comfort—even luxury, considering that it had been the dwelling of a recluse.

“I hereby christen thee Camp Dacre,” exclaimed Tom, as he opened the door.

“Hooray!” cried the others.

There was a large living-room, occupying almost the entire first floor, and from this there led up a rustic staircase, off which opened several small bedrooms. A gallery, affording access to these rooms, ran round the whole interior of the building.

Jared Fogg and his assistant on the wagon lost no time in unloading the boys' belongings, as they had a long drive home before them, and wished to get an early start back to the Cross Roads. In

half an hour's time a great pile of baggage lay before the house. This mountain of luggage the boys assured their guides they could distribute themselves. The station-master and his assistant, therefore, had no excuse to remain, and "good byes" were quickly said. Jared Fogg drove a little way and then pulled up abruptly. He got out of his rig and came back down the rocky path to where the boys were busily sorting out their equipment.

"Say, Tom," he whispered, going up to the eldest of the Dacre brothers, "you said last night, didn't you, that you'd spent some time in the West?"

"Why, yes," said Tom, somewhat puzzled at the station-master's mysterious manner; "what of it?"

"Wall, then, take this." The old man fumbled under his coat-tails and produced a huge, old-fashioned revolver. "Ef you come frum ther West, you'll know what to do with it. Ain't often you'll need it, but when you do you'll need it dern bad."

Before Tom could reply he found himself alone and gazing at Jared's angular figure sprinting back to his wagon.

"Giv' it back when yer see me. Good luck ter yer," the station-master shouted back, as he whipped up his horses and soon vanished behind the big pines.

None of the others had seen the transaction, so Tom, pondering on the station-master's mysterious manner, placed the pistol in his hip-pocket, where it felt as big and as cumbersome as a gatling-gun.

"That old fellow knows, or suspects, something about this place he won't tell us," he said to himself, as he set about helping Sandy and Jack to cart the folding cots they had brought with them, to their sleeping-rooms.

In the meantime the professor had been busy sorting out his belongings, consisting chiefly of books and insect-catching apparatus, and Jasper had "set up housekeeping" in the kitchen of the bungalow, which was in a small extension in the rear of the main structure. The colored man

found the culinary region completely equipped with pots and pans, and although there were not nearly enough plates, knives and forks, not to speak of cups and saucers, for such a numerous party, still, as they had brought along a supply of these, they were well provided for in every respect.

By the time everything was in order Jasper announced that a delayed dinner was ready, by beating on the bottom of a tin pan with a big spoon, and a group of hungry, excited people drew up Chisholm Dacre's rustic chairs about the table. It bore a big dish of beans, fried ham, preserves, and cups of steaming hot coffee. There was, too, a big pitcher of the clearest, coldest water the boys had ever tasted. It came from a well, bored deep in the rock behind the house.

Jasper, with broad grins, apologized for his dinner.

"Ah don' bin plum flummergasted by the new-someness of my immedjut injunvirement," he explained, "but Ah hopes by suppah time ter have somethin' muh conpropriate ter set out."

"That speech is a meal in itself, Jasper," laughed Tom.

Dinner disposed of, Tom and Jack left Sandy and the professor to their own devices while they selected two favorite rods and announced their intention of supplementing Jasper's supper by some trout.

"If there aren't some speckled beauties in that stream above the lake, call me a Dutch—— I mean," Jack hastened to amend, noticing the professor, "no fisherman."

"Vell, MacTaffish, you und me go by der woods; maybe ve get some queer kind of bugs, alretty no?" the professor remarked, as the boys set off up the rocky banks of the stream.

"Hoot mon! Maybe we'll get a doodle-bug," grinned Sandy.

The sport was as good as Tom had anticipated. In an hour's time they had six fine, fighting trout to their credit, all of more than a pound's weight.

"Pretty good sport," was Tom's comment.

About the middle of the afternoon they came to a place where the stream branched off into

two forks. One led in the direction of the continuation of the cliff which towered above the bungalow. The other wound along the bed of the valley.

"I'll take the left one and try my luck; you take the other," said Tom, as they reached the forks. After a few words more they parted, agreeing to meet about dusk.

Tom found the branch he had selected as prolific of fish as the most ardent angler could have wished. So fast did the trout bite, in fact, that it grew almost monotonous.

"What a paradise for a pot-hunter," thought the boy, as he unhooked a three-quarter-pounder and threw it back into the stream. "Guess I'd better think of getting back. I've as many now as anybody with a conscience would want to kill."

The boy had just started to move in the direction from which he had come when a sudden sound checked him as abruptly as if a hand had been laid on his shoulder. He had heard footsteps stumbling toward him over the rocks, and two voices in conversation.

His first impulse was to step round from behind a clump of alder-bushes which screened him from the view of any one advancing up the trail. His next was to hastily draw back and conceal himself.

In the voice of one of the speakers Tom had recognized the gruff inflections of the bearded man—Nate Trulliber, their neighbor. In the voice of Trulliber's companion he had heard his own name mentioned.

CHAPTER IX

THE CLIFF DWELLER

Nate's companion seemed to be remonstrating with him about something.

"I tell you, Nate," the listening boy heard him say, "my advice is to leave them alone. They're only boys, and maybe we can finish up our business and be away from here long before they wake up to anything that's going on."

"And I tell you you are wrong," rumbled Nate's gruff tones in reply. "I told you about what happened at the station last night, and that there's one cube less in the box than there ought to be."

"Yes," was the rejoinder; "well, what about it?"

"What about it?" echoed Nate; "there's just this much about it, that I'm pretty sure that one

of the boys suspects something, and grabbed up that cube to examine it."

"Well, what if he did? I don't imagine that a bit of lead is going to give him much of a clue to our business, sharp as he may be." The speaker, however, seemed disturbed.

"Just the same, Trimmers, it's blamed uncomfortable to have them around in the vicinity," grumbled Nate. "It would be a whole lot better if we could get 'em out. So long as that old fool Chisholm was alive I didn't care. He found the vein, and then hadn't sense enough to work it. If it hadn't been for my sharp ears and eyes we'd never have found it, either, Ralph."

"Now that we have, I don't see that it does us much good, except as a work-shop and a hiding place for the stuff," snorted the man addressed as Ralph. "If things had gone as you told us, and the bungalow had been abandoned, why, we could have worked it out and nobody the wiser, but now these kids have arrived we'll have to suspend operations all the year, for there'll be no

doing any work in the winter, even if we could get the stuff out."

"That's true," agreed the other. "We've got to get rid of them. However, I've got another plan which I think will work out. Listen."

The two were passing the concealed boy as they spoke the last words; but so low did Nate sink his voice that his words were inaudible. The two passed on up the trail and a few seconds later it was safe for Tom to come out from behind his bush.

The conversation he had overheard gave him, as may be imagined, considerable food for thought as he made his way back down the stream toward the bungalow. What were the men doing? What were the operations to which they had referred? In what way could he or his brother be interested in them, or interfere with them?

All at once he came upon something that set his thoughts on other matters, a dark hole where the stream swirled beneath a fallen pine log, which he had not noticed on his way up. As his

eyes encountered it there came a mighty rush and a splash in the pool, and then silence once more as oily rings spread out on the water.

"By George! there's the daddy of all the trout," murmured Tom to himself, hastily adjusting his rod and selecting a new fly for the delectation of the giant he was sure lurked in the pool.

Patiently he cast and recast, crouching low, as the brush at this point of the stream grew almost up to the banks, and made it difficult to throw the line above where the boy felt sure the monster, of which he had caught a glimpse, lurked.

"One more try and then I'll leave it for another day," thought the boy to himself as he suddenly became aware how dim the light was growing. "Jack will be waiting."

Mustering all his skill, Tom daintily skimmed his flies above the spot where the big rise had occurred. Hardly had they flicked the water before there was a sudden parting of the pool, and a great silvery body tore at them. Tom, half wild with excitement, struck a moment too soon, and the monster trout rushed down to the bottom

of his dark retreat before the boy had time to reel out. At the same instant there came a sharp "crack," and Tom knew that he had paid the penalty of his rashness in a broken rod "tip."

"Well, did you ever see such luck!" he exclaimed, seizing the line with his hands and determined not to give up the struggle so easily. As he gripped the tackle, however, the treacherous log on which he stood, and which was slimy with the accumulation of the moss of years, played him false. The lad's feet slipped and shot from beneath him simultaneously. Down into the pool he toppled, immersed in the deep water. Worse still, in falling his head struck a projection on the log, stunning him temporarily.

Tom would have been in a serious fix, indeed, if, almost at the moment that he fell, a tall young man of possibly twenty-five, and dressed in woodsman's garb, with a dash of the picturesque in it, had not suddenly stopped short on his way up the trail to listen to the sudden commotion ahead of him.

"Now, what in the name of the immortal Abe



Sam Hartley, laying hold of the boy's collar, dragged out Tom's half-conscious form.

Lincoln was that?" he exclaimed to himself as he did so.

"A fish? Not much, Sam Hartley, no fish ever born—query: are fish born?—ever made a noise like that. Let's have a look."

Talking thus rapidly and disjointedly to himself, the young man shoved the bushes at the side of the path eagerly aside and made his way to the edge of the big hole.

"Hullo—boy. — Fallen in. — Senseless.—May drown.—Fish him out."

Sam Hartley, as the young man had addressed himself, waded waist-deep into the oily-looking lurking place of the big trout, and laying hold of the boy's collar, dragged out Tom's half-conscious form. He laid it on the bank and bent over it carefully.

"Hum! Close call, that.—Heart all right,—pulse all right—soon be all right all over—wonder who he is?—Sam Hartley have to find out—make a note"—here he drew out a small note-book and made an entry, almost as rapidly as he spoke—"hullo, boy's opening eyes—all right, boy?—

yes," he answered himself as Tom's lips moved. "Better be off—never do—boy see Sam Hartley—might spoil everything."

As Tom opened his eyes fully and gazed about him he had accordingly no more than a fleeting glimpse of the young man who had probably saved him from drowning. His faculties rushed back with his returning senses, and he began to wonder what had happened in the last few seconds.

"That's queer," he mused to himself. "I could almost have sworn that I saw some one dash off up the trail as I opened my eyes. Come to think of it, some one must have pulled me out, for I feel as if I'd had my senses knocked galley-west for a minute, and I couldn't have got out myself."

He rose to his feet and looked about him to see if he could spy any clue to what had taken place, but, as the ground was rock-strewn and stony, the stranger's feet had left no telltale marks.

"Well," mused Tom, as he gathered up his broken rod and started off to join Jack, who he

knew must be impatiently awaiting him, "I'll have a few things to tell Jack, including the true full and particular account of the fish that got away."

In the meantime Sam Hartley—for, taking his word for it, so we must call him—made his way on up the bank of the stream. He had, however, paused to listen till he heard the boy whom he had fished out of the trout-pool scramble to his feet. He wanted to make certain, it seemed, that Tom's accident was not more serious than he had assumed.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed suddenly, in his sharp, explosive way, as he scrambled on up the trail—if such the rocky way at the side of the stream could be called.

"I have it—boy one of new-comers,—Dacre's place—upset Trulliber's plans. Good joke,—very."

Chuckling to himself, Sam Hartley continued to make his way up the creek bank for about a mile more, and then, at a point where the walls of the little valley began to come together, he crossed the watercourse by a fallen log and began to clam-

ber up the steep, rock-strewn hillside. His way now lay beneath a thick growth of pines and spruce, and on the bed of needles beneath his feet he made no more noise than would some denizen of the forest. About him the mighty trunks shot up like the columns of a cathedral. Thus he advanced till he reached a shelf of rock which ran at a steep incline up the cliff face. From the floor of the valley he scrambled up this, and then zig-zagged off to another ledge. This second ledge, however, had in front of it a sort of escarpment or battlement of rock, worn, probably, in glacial times.

Sam Hartley, as he climbed, attained the bare face of the cliff above the pine-tops, but the natural trench in which he crept along afforded him an excellent protection against any observer from the other side of the gulch—or from below. At about a hundred and fifty feet from the foot of the cliff the trench deepened and terminated abruptly in the mouth of a small cave. Above the entrance a mighty boulder, rolled down the cliff face in prehistoric times, hung poised, but the

possibility that some day it might roll down and block the entrance did not seem to bother Sam Hartley. The interior of the cavern was perfectly dark, and might, for all any one approaching it could have told, as well have housed a wild beast as a man. But it afforded a home to Sam Hartley, apparently, for he entered it without hesitation, and, once inside, struck a light.

Holding the match high, he soon spied a candle, stuck on a rough shelf of rock, and lighted it. Its rays illumined a strange scene. At the extreme end of the cave, which penetrated into the cliff face for about twenty feet, was a bed of spruce boughs, inclined against the wall so as to form as luxurious a woodsman's spring-mattress as any one could wish. Over this couch were thrown two or three blankets. For the rest the furnishings of the cave were simple to rudeness. A frying-pan, a rifle, a box which might have contained ammunition, but which did double duty as a chair or a table, a kettle, and an axe and hatchet. Such was the interior of Sam Hartley's home.

Primitive as it all was, the young man gazed at it in semi-humorous satisfaction.

“Good evening, my light-housekeeping cave,” he remarked, in his whimsical manner; “it was a lucky day I found you. Chased a wild cat and found a cave. Funny how things fall out. Lovely prospect, too, my cave has, and no danger of my ever finding my home burned down.” He approached the cave entrance and peered cautiously out over the valley below. From the elevation at which he crouched he had a fine view of the surroundings below him, bathed in a ruddy glow by the setting sun.

Sam Hartley’s penetrating blue eyes, however, did not seem to be engaged in observing the beauties of the scene. Rather was he concentrating his attention on a group of buildings across the valley and a little farther down it. They were large and numerous and tumbledown, and formed in fact quite a settlement. In fact, they had once hived a numerous community of active workers, for they formed the abandoned “camp” of the

lumber company, which, as we know, was now occupied by the Trullibers and their boarders.

“Well, as hymn says—‘setting sun sees some good done,’ ” remarked Sam Hartley to himself, as he concluded his scrutiny and moved about his cave making preparations for his supper. From a nail he removed the carcass of a rabbit and a “sizable” piece of bacon, which he placed in the frying-pan. His next task was to kindle a fire, and in a few minutes he had the contents of the frying-pan merrily sizzling. From another corner he produced a stock of pilot bread, and then put on a pot which its fragrant aroma soon proclaimed to be coffee. Sam’s manner of eating his meal was as primitive as his way of preparing it. He munched his rabbit and bacon direct from the frying-pan, using a fork, however, in the process of transfer to his mouth. His coffee, as soon as it was cooled enough, he also quaffed from the receptacle in which it had been prepared. This much of his meal dispatched, he produced from one of his numerous pockets a large cake of chocolate, which he steadily munched.

"Ah," sighed Sam, as he concluded, "solid comfort—million dollars not make me feel better. Cliff-side palace—great place—everything—even chimney." He glanced upward at a dark cranny in the roof of the cave, which must have had an outlet somewhere above, for no smoke remained in the cave after his cooking was concluded. "Well, now to work."

Dragging his blankets under the candle, so that they formed a comfortable seat, Sam Hartley produced his notebook—the same in which he had jotted down the incident of Tom's rescue—and for some moments wrote rapidly and in a well-formed hand.

Suddenly a slight noise outside made him pause.

Any one gazing into the cave at that moment would have seen a strange change in Sam Hartley. He dropped his book and pencil like a flash, and sprang to his feet as nimbly as a cat. As he did so his hand slid back, by an almost imperceptible movement, to his hip pocket, and the next moment a blued-steel automatic revolver—small and

pretty as a toy, but deadly as a rattlesnake—glittered in his hand.

Without more sound than that made by a crouching panther, he reached a quick hand up to the candle and extinguished it. The fire he had scattered when he concluded his cooking.

Then Sam Hartley crept through the darkness he had abruptly created toward the door of the cave. As he reached it he fell back with an exclamation, as there came a scattering rattle of stones and a sharp sound like a quick intake of breath.

The next minute he broke into a hearty, ringing laugh.

“Another of them blamed cat-a-mounts,” he grunted; “reckon he smelled cookin’—looked in for supper—hum, getting nervous; won’t do; too much work ahead.”

The cave dweller stood under the starlight for a brief interval longer, gazing down the valley. Far below him, in the abandoned lumber camp, he could see glowing windows cheerfully winking.

He gazed at the tiny points of light for quite

a space of time without any noticeable expression crossing his sphinx-like face. Then he turned, and, reëntering the cave, lit his candle once more, and wrote steadily in his notebook till far into the night.

CHAPTER X

A SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE

"Tom!

"Tom!

"TOM!"

"Well, what is it?"

Tom Dacre sat sleepily up in bed the next morning, and was surprised to see that it was light and that his brother was shaking his shoulder.

"Hullo," he exclaimed, "what time is it?"

"After six; look at that sun!" rejoined Jack, gazing out of the window. "How's the head?"

"All right," rejoined Tom, sitting up on his cot and rubbing the afflicted member. "Feels a bit sore yet, but otherwise all to the merry."

The boys quickly dressed and traversed the gallery, pausing on their way to thunder on the

doors of Sandy and the professor. Outside, as Jack had said, the sun had already climbed above the cliff-top at the back of the house, and was sparkling brightly on the little lake. An aroma of cooking, pleasing to the nostrils of two hungry boys, filled the air from the direction of the kitchen, where Jasper was already at work in his particular department.

The boys wandered down toward the lakeside and on to the wharf. They wished to make an inspection of the two canoes and the bateau. The two former were in good condition, but the bateau's seams had shrunk in the sun, and it was possible to see light through them.

"A good wetting will soon swell them up," pronounced Tom, after a brief examination; "come on, let's heave her overboard."

The next minute a splash announced that the bateau was in the lake. She soon filled with water and sank to the level of her gunwales. The canoes followed.

"Come on, I'll go you for a swim," suddenly

shouted Tom, who had been gazing into the clear, cool depths of the water for some seconds.

"Wonder how the water is?" inquired Jack dubiously. In its green clarity the lake, indeed, looked pretty chilly to any one standing on the bank.

"Only way to tell is to try," rejoined Tom, rapidly kicking off his hunting boots. His khaki trousers followed, and then he divested himself of his heavy woodsman's shirt of dark blue flannel, and then came the underclothes. A second later a splash and the sight of a pink form cleaving the depths showed that Tom was "trying the water."

"How is it?" demanded Jack, half undressed, awaiting the verdict.

"F-f-f-fine!" sputtered Tom, striking out for the farther side.

As a matter of fact, the water had the sharp chill peculiar to lakes in the Maine uplands, but Tom, after his first shock, found it glorious. At any rate, he wasn't going to lose the fun of seeing

Jack's expression when he felt the sudden chill of his immersion.

Splash!

In dived Jack, to come to the surface a moment later shaking his head vigorously.

"S-s-say," he chattered, "call that f-f-f-f-fine, you l-l-l-lobster? It's c-c-c-cold."

"Never mind," laughed the other; "you'll get used to it in a minute, and it's good for your sensitive young nerves. Anyhow, don't let on how cold it is, and we'll have some fun with the professor and Sandy; see, they're just coming from the house."

Sure enough, the spectacled Teuton and the freckle-faced, rubicund-haired Sandy were just emerging from the bungalow as he spoke.

"Hullo, professor, good morning," hailed Tom. "Come on and have a dip before breakfast. It's great."

"You are sure idt iss not coldt, alretty?" inquired the professor dubiously.

"It's f-f-fine," sputtered Jack.

"Hoot mon; it's a bonny loch the morn," ex-

claimed Sandy, who needed no second invitation to divest himself of his garments, which were similar to the other lads', and to plunge in. He came to the surface about to voice an indignant denial of Tom's characterization of the water, but Jack immediately threw a column of water over him which checked what might have proved a warning to the fleshy professor.

"Vait till I find me a goot place to gedt in," shivered the German, cautiously poking at the bank with one of his fat toes.

"Ah, here I have him, a nice, gendle ingline," he muttered, as he found what seemed to him to be a gradual descent into the lake. Frequent discoveries that the boys' statements were not always to be taken literally had made him cautious.

But the professor's intention of testing the water at a slight depth and then withdrawing if it proved cold, was frustrated. The extreme clarity of the water in the lake made it seem much shallower than it really was, and the professor, when he stepped into his "nice, gendle ingline"

immediately found his pudgy form floundering in seven feet or more of pretty cold water.

"Ach, himmel!" he sputtered, as he rose to the surface after his unexpected immersion, "de vater iss next-door neighbors mid freezing p-p-point."

The German, however, was not going to let the boys see that he had received a shock when he plunged in and he struck out with the best of them, the first chill soon wearing off. After ten minutes or so they emerged with appetites, as Sandy put it—as sharp as a Scotchman's burr. Jasper's breakfast included a great pile of smoking buckwheat cakes, which vanished like snowflakes on a stove top before the boys' onslaught. Nor did the professor lag behind them.

"De appetites of dem boys is simply simalonerous," exclaimed Jasper, surveying the wreckage, and coining, as was his habit, what seemed an appropriate word, "and as fo' dat perfusser, he stamalgamates mah belief in de posserbilities of der human appetite."

The meal concluded, Tom called what he called a council-of-war. With the professor "in the

chair," so to speak, the boys discussed the situation, and Tom's proposition that one of their first duties should be to find some clue to the meaning of the "Leaden Key," aroused great enthusiasm.

"Idt seems to me," observed the professor, in his ponderous way, "dot der first t'ing vot is to be done is to be sysdimadig in de search. Now, I vould suggest a cardiological survey made of der estade."

"A—what do you say, professor?" inquired Tom.

"A cardiological survey," repeated the professor blandly. "I mean dot you make a map. You know ven Von Moltke set oudt to smash der French, all he hadt to didt vos to pull oudt of a drawer a handful of blue maps. Idt vos system dot vun dot var."

"And when we set out to smash the French we drew out of a window a red wig," whispered Jack in an undertone to Sandy.

"That's my idea, professor," agreed Tom. "I've got a tablet in my grip that I brought to write letters home on. I can make it on that."

“And I’ve a braw foontain pen—that is, when it foontains,” put in Sandy.

“Well, the sooner we get about it the better,” said Tom, after some more conversation of the kind recorded above. “Are you coming with us, professor?”

“Nein. I vill stay here und try ter catch some butterflies by der oudtside,” rejoined the other. “I am a little grosser to be tramping over rocks und stones mit boys. Budt mind, boys, und don’t get up by no foolishnesses.”

The boys readily promised, and a few moments later set out. Their way led up the creek side traversed by Tom on the day previous, and he knew, from information given him by the lawyer, that by following the watercourse he would reach the white post which marked the boundary of the boys’ domain in that direction.

From time to time as they walked—and when Sandy’s fountain pen consented to work—Tom made notes and sketches on his tablet. They paused a while at the hole inhabited by the giant trout, which Sandy promptly christened “Jumbo.”

While they were gazing into the dark depths of Jumbo's habitation there was a sudden sound of brisk footsteps walking down the creek side.

The two boys, to whom Tom had recounted what he had overheard the day before, instantly suggested seeking a place of concealment, but Tom vetoed it.

"Somehow it isn't open and aboveboard," he said. "No, if it's Trulliber, or anybody else, we'll meet them just as though nothing had occurred. After all, we don't know for certain that the conversation I overheard yesterday referred to us."

But the newcomer proved to be neither Nate Trulliber nor anybody connected with him. Instead it was Sam Hartley, who a moment later appeared before the boys. It will be recollected that Tom had not obtained more than a glimpse of the cave-dweller the evening before, and even then his senses were not in a condition to retain any impression, so that to him the newcomer was as much of a stranger as he was to the other two.

If Sam Hartley was astonished at his sudden encounter with the boys he did not show it. In-

stead, his clean-shaven, almost boyish, face lit up with a cheerful smile, and he extended his hand.

“Ah, boys—good morning—nice day—sketching—no; I see, making a map—very good—introduce myself—Sam Hartley—you Dacre boys—friend MacTavish—Sandy—lots of sand, eh?—good thing for a boy—how do you like it as far as you’ve gone?”

These words came in such a torrent that the boys were quite dazed, and stood looking at the stranger with undisguised amazement till Sandy whispered to Jack.

“He talks like Tom’s phonograph with the spring wound too tight.”

The stranger’s ears, it seemed, were sharper than either of the boys had anticipated.

“Ha-ha!—very good,” he snapped; “talk like phonograph—wind handle—she’s off—can’t stop—jabber-jabber—jabber—bang!—run down; bust! Too bad.”

The boys exchanged amazed glances. From the man’s extraordinary manner of speaking they were at a loss to know if they had to deal with a

lunatic, or merely a young man afflicted with an amiable eccentricity. His next words, however, gave them a different feeling toward their strange companion.

“See you look all right,” he shot out, in his volcanic way, addressing Tom. “Good—very good. Not so good if you’d stayed in that pool, though. —Fishing for food—might have been food for fishes. Ha! ha! joke—excuse me. How I rattle on,—ha-ha.”

He stopped as abruptly as he had begun to talk.

“Then it is you I have to thank for my rescue. I really don’t know how to express my gratitude. I was stunned, it seemed, and if you had not come along just in time I——” began Tom, when the other broke in.

“All right—glad to do it—fine boy—good lad—very. Lucky to be there. Don’t mention it—I beg—over now — saved — watery grave — hur-ray!”

More than ever the boys did not know what to make of this remarkable young man with the keen blue eyes and the investigating nose that was in-

clined to have a curious snub. Outside of his conversation there was nothing very remarkable about him, except an impression he conveyed of intense alertness. His sharp eyes seemed to take in every member of the group at once as he talked, and, as Sandy said afterward, "it wouldna be na wonder to me if the chiel had eyes in the back of his head."

For the rest, Sam Hartley was dressed much as the boys were—in stout hunting boots with thick soles, corduroy trousers, a wide leather belt and blue shirt, covered with a jacket of the same material as his nether garments. The sole touch of peculiarity in his clothes was the fact that he wore a red bandanna handkerchief round his throat in Western fashion, and that his hat was a wide-brimmed sombrero, completing the plainsman's touch lent to his costume by the presence of the neck wrapping.

He had hardly concluded his explosive protest to Tom's grateful tribute when there came the sound of other footsteps coming down the rocky trail. Rapidly they grew nearer, and in a

few seconds Nate Trulliber's big form rounded the clump of wild growth from which Sam Hartley had materialized.

The black-bearded Trulliber started, as if his thoughts might have been on that very subject, as he saw the boys, but the next minute his lips parted in a pleasant smile and he extended his hand. Now, Nate Trulliber, when he smiled, looked even less pleasing than when his grim face was in repose, but the boys could not very well condemn a man on his looks, so they shook hands all round and in reply to Nate's "My name's Nate Trulliber—your neighbor," they introduced themselves, although Trulliber knew them almost as well as they knew themselves.

It occurred to Tom, who did the introducing, that it would be only polite, while he was at it, to extend the courtesy to Sam Hartley. With this intention, he looked round for that individual, but to his astonishment the young man with the explosive conversation was not there. Had the earth swallowed him he could not have vanished more completely or noiselessly.

"Looking for some one?" asked Nate Trulliber, noting the lad's startled look.

By this time Jack and Sandy had also discovered the fact that the stranger with the rapid-fire tongue had vanished.

"Yes, we——" began Sandy, when, to his astonishment, Tom cut him short with:

"Why, the fact is, Mr. Trulliber, I dropped my knife, and I was rude enough to resume the search for it."

"Then there was no one here with you when I came along?"

The man bent his searching eyes on Tom's as if he would drag the truth from him; but into Tom's mind there had shot one of those mysterious instincts which we all obtain at times. Somehow he felt that Sam Hartley had vanished for a good reason, and that that reason had something to do with Nate Trulliber, so he said boldly, in reply to the other's brusque question:

"Why, no. What made you think so?"

"Oh, I just thought I heard another voice, but I guess I was mistaken," rejoined Trulliber, with

a resumption of his unpleasant smile. Then, abruptly changing the subject: "This is a fine property you have here, Mr. Dacre."

CHAPTER XI

NATE MAKES A PROPOSITION

Nate Trulliber sat down on the end of the big log from which Tom had taken his involuntary bath as he spoke, and, producing a jackknife, began to whittle a bit of willow branch.

"I was on my way down to call on you boys this morning," he remarked.

"Indeed," rejoined Tom, who, after his involuntary eavesdropping of the day before, was more suspicious of Trulliber than he had been even at the time of their encounter at the depot; "glad to have you come around any time."

"Thanks," answered Trulliber, his eyes now riveted on his whittling as intently as if it were the only occupation in which he had any interest. "I wanted to talk a little business with you."

"Is that so?" asked Tom, not knowing what was coming, and having no other answer ready.

"Yep," went on Trulliber; "I've got a pretty good proposition to make to you about that there land of yours—how'd you like to sell?"

"Sell," echoed Tom; "why, we'd never even thought of it. Anyhow, it doesn't lie with me alone. You know my brother is an equal owner with me."

"I know. That is, I'd heard so," rejoined the other; "but I thought maybe you'd both like to turn it into ready money. You see," he went on, with a great appearance of candor and openness, "I've been figgerin' that I could make some money timber-cutting in the winter, and old Chisholm Dacre left such a sight of fine spruce an' pine standin' around here that with my knowledge of the lumber business, and the facilities that's here—the flume an' all—I could make it worth your while to sell. What do you say?"

Although Tom had not the least idea what Nate Trulliber was driving at, he yet was quite keen enough to know that the other was trying to draw

out of him his estimate of the value of the land, though for what purpose the boy could not imagine. He only felt that it was so. He therefore replied guardedly.

"To tell you the truth, we came into the property so recently that we have never even thought of selling. I can tell you, in fact, that such an idea never entered our heads."

"Well," said Nate Trulliber slowly, "I'm in a position to offer you a good price for it—what do you say to \$60,000?"

Boy as he was, and inexperienced in the ways of the world, Tom knew at once that the price named was so extravagant as to be fanciful. It was far and away above the value of the land as it stood; even taking into consideration the fine timber on it. Nate Trulliber, watching the boy from under his heavy eyelids, noted the look of astonishment on Tom's face and hastened to add:

"Of course, I couldn't pay that down. I'm only a poor man. But if I expected to cut a good stand of lumber in here I reckon I could get some

one to back me. I could pay down say \$6,000, and the rest in notes to mature in ten years."

Tom determined not to give the man the information he seemed to be looking for. Trulliber was evidently trying to find out something about the terms of the will. Tom therefore fenced with him for a while longer, and finally Trulliber grew impatient. It was clear he had not anticipated meeting with opposition from what he doubtless described mentally as "mere boys."

"I tell you you're foolish not to take advantage of a good opportunity," he snapped. "This land will never bring you again an offer anywhere near mine. You're crazy not to sell, I tell you. The land is no good to you as it stands."

"Then what good would it be to you?" shot out Tom. "I guess if you want to buy it so badly, Mr. Trulliber, we want to keep it just as badly."

"All right," muttered Trulliber, who was not enough of a diplomat to conceal his evident chagrin, "I'll not make my offer again, and perhaps when next I come around you'll sing a different tune."

He angrily threw down the stick he had been whittling and started to walk off up the trail in the direction from which he had come, and which led to his home in the abandoned lumber camp.

"Well," he muttered to himself, as he ground his teeth savagely, "fair methods have failed; it now remains to try other means. I'm not to be beaten by a pack of young cubs."

"Whist mon, but what a fire-eater yon is," exclaimed Sandy, as the boys' neighbor strode off with a dark frown on his heavy face.

"I can't make it out at all," said Jack. "Just because we refused to consider an offer to sell, the man seemed to become mad as a hornet. What do you make of it, Tom?"

"Just this," rejoined the elder lad, who had been knitting his brows in deep thought, "there's something on this place that Trulliber, or somebody behind him, for whom he is acting, is anxious to get hold of. If it's so valuable that they are anxious to obtain possession of it, it must be of equal importance to us to keep our grip on it."

"And you bet we'll do it," assented Jack heartily.

"Hoot mon; that's the braw way to talk," commented Sandy. "But I ken they have the key to the secret, whatever it is, and you have nae."

"But we'll get it, Sandy," laughed Tom; "we've got the whole summer before us. You may depend on it we'll get it—if there's any way on earth to do it," he added, with set determination.

"And now," he went on, "let's finish making the map, and when we get home again I've got a plan to propose to you fellows that may—mind you, I say may—result in our uncovering some solution to the mystery. Something queer seems to have been in the air since we landed in Norton's Cross Roads."

The making of the map went forward all the forenoon, and when the sun reached the zenith the lads stretched themselves in the shade of a giant pine to eat the luncheon they had brought with them.

"Say, this is great, isn't it?" demanded Jack,

as, after disposing of the viands, the three boys lay at their ease on the aromatic bed of soft pine needles and listened to the deep-toned orchestra of the wind in the treetops above them. Through the velvety masses of pine foliage they could catch glimpses of a clean-swept sky above them. Life felt very good to the three Bungalow Boys just then.

"An' it gives you a braw appetite the noon," commented Sandy, picking up a hitherto overlooked scrap of cake. "Mon, ma stoomach feels as if it had no more bottom to it than the bonny, bonny Loch Lomond."

"We can believe that," laughed Tom; "likewise you've got Loch Lomond beaten a Scotch mile for capacity."

A short time afterward the three boys scrambled to their feet and, guided by Tom's compass, struck up the hillside once more toward the east. This led them in a direction behind and above the bungalow. The way was tedious. It wound among scattered masses of rock, and more than once one or other of the lads would stop short

with a muttered "Ouch," as his foot caught in a crevice or his ankle twisted on the rough foothold.

At last Tom's tablet was almost full of notes and rough sketches.

"Mon, it lukes as though a fly had tumbled in the ink-pot and then done a Salome dance on your paper," commented Sandy.

Shortly afterward the three boys decided it was about time to turn back. They had by this time reached the eastern boundary of the estate, and Tom asserted stoutly that he had it mapped completely, both in that quarter and in the southeasterly section, in which lay the creek and the big trout hole, and farther up the valley the abandoned lumber camp, where dwelt the Trullibers.

It only remained to survey the cliff summits on the opposite side of the lake, upon which, so Tom understood, his late uncle's property extended for fifty acres or more.

"We'll do that to-morrow," he decided, as they made their way down the steep hillside. "I guess we've done enough map-making to-day to make

Columbus or any of those other explorer chaps turn green with envy."

Here and there as they descended, a rabbit, venturing out in the evening cool, leaped up and darted into the brush, making Sandy wish that he had brought his twenty-two rifle.

Again they would "put up" a covey of partridges that rose from under their feet with a loud "whirring" sound that made them jump, as if a convention of winged rattles had suddenly taken flight.

All at once, as they were passing one of the occasional open spaces among the pines, they heard a noise far above them on the steep hillside. A shower of stones, dislodged by whatever was passing above them, came rattling and bounding downward, almost striking them.

"What on earth is that, a bear?" gasped Jack.

"A bear," scornfully rejoined Tom. "Bears don't come out of the mountains at this time of year. I'll bet there are no bears nearer than Mount Katahdin. Hullo!"—he broke off suddenly—"look there!"



A huge boulder bounded across their path scarcely a foot in front of them.

He pointed above him excitedly, and as the others followed the direction of his finger they saw a momentary glimpse on the hillside of a figure resembling the wild one that had darted across the road on the day of their arrival.

"Must be a hunter," exclaimed Jack. "I think——"

What he thought the others were destined never to know, for at that moment there came a warning shout from above.

"Look out—below!"

Mingling with the voice was a mighty crashing, rending sound, and almost simultaneously a huge boulder bounded across their path scarcely a foot in front of them. Had they not halted, they must have been full in the path of the big rock.

"Say, fellows," exclaimed Tom, breaking the silence, "if it hadn't been for that friendly shout, that rock would have hit us."

"Not a doubt of it," agreed Jack; "we're lucky to be alive."

A shudder ran through them as they realized

that had it not been for the sudden outcry that had halted them they must inevitably have been terribly mutilated, if not killed.

While they still stood gazing in wonderment, their hearts beating thick and fast at the idea of the imminence of the peril they had escaped, a figure suddenly emerged from the timber at the side of the trail and stood before them.

With a shout of surprise, the boys recognized Sam Hartley, who had so mysteriously vanished in the morning.

CHAPTER XII

THE PROFESSOR MISSING

“Hullo—just in time—glad to have been—nasty thing—getting crushed by boulder—bang! smash!—roll you out flat as a ham sandwich—unpleasant—very!”

In spite of the peril they had escaped by such a hair's breadth, the boys could hardly forbear smiling as Sam Hartley sputtered out the above in his usual Fourth-of-July fashion.

“It was you who called, then?” asked Tom.

“Yes—just happened along—saw boulder was going—pretty strong—not strong enough to catch boulder, though—time for quick thought—if any one below get smashed—looked—saw you—shouted—you heard—stopped—just in time—exactly.”

“We did stop just in time, thanks to your

friendly warning," said Tom warmly; "but it seems remarkable that a boulder should have become dislodged—just as we were about to pass under it."

"What I should te-erm a ve-ry re-markable coincidence," put in Sandy.

The other glanced at him quickly with his friendly, keen blue eyes.

"Yes—just as you say—it was a very remarkable coincidence—very."

"More especially as we thought we saw some one running along the hillside above us, as if anxious to escape observation, just before the boulder fell," observed Tom, eying the other narrowly to ascertain the effect of his words.

If he expected the man we know as Sam Hartley to betray either by word or action that he had been perfectly aware that the boulder had been dislodged by other than natural means, however, the boy was disappointed. The keen-eyed young man met his searching glance with a look as blank as if he had not the least comprehension of Tom's words.

"Hardly think so," he crackled, "not likely—might have been rabbit. Rabbits very thick—nuisance—fall over them—too bad—very."

"Well, my friend," thought Tom to himself, "I don't know what your motive is, but for some reason or other you don't want to confide what you know in us."

"Yes, we must have been mistaken," he said aloud; "but in any event, it was a very fortunate thing you happened to be there when you were. That's twice you have appeared in the nick of time. I wonder, will there be a third time?"

"I wonder," repeated the other, in such steady tones, so utterly unlike his usual sputtering intonation, that the boys started and looked at him. The next second, however, his old manner was on him again. "Hardly think so—as you say—odd—very—twice got you out of hole—no, third time not likely—but look out!—sharp!"

Having said this much, the other seemed to be suddenly overcome with confusion, or some other emotion, and with a hurried "Good night—all right now—won't try again," he shot off into the

woods with an abruptness equal to the Gatling-gun rapidity of his speech.

"Well, of all the rapid-fire folks I ever saw, he's got the speediest shaded," grinned Jack, as the keen-eyed young man did his disappearing act. "I wonder if he could be induced to do that for a salary? He'd have anything I've ever seen in vaudeville beaten a mile."

"I'd give a cookie to know who he is, and what he's doing in the woods hereabout," said Tom. "I thought at first that he might be an artist, or a nature faker, or something like that, but somehow the more you know of him the less he gives you that idea."

"Yes, there's nothing of the dreamy artist about that Jack-in-the-box," laughed Jack; "he's more like a box of firecrackers."

"Hoot mon, he comes an' goes like the mist on Ben Nevis," burred out Sandy; "you see him the noo, and the noo you dinna."

"There's a good Scotch simile for you," laughed Tom. "Well, there's no use puzzling over who or what he is. I guess we'll find out

in time; that is, if he hasn't evaporated altogether. In the meantime I'm mighty hungry, and nothing would look so good to me as some of Jasper's supper."

"Same here," agreed Jack.

"I could pick a bit," assented Sandy.

"There goes Loch Lomond again," laughed Jack, as they started off at a brisk pace down the mountainside. About a quarter of a mile down they found the big boulder wedged between two trees. It was a massive piece of stone, as the bruised and crushed trees it had left in its battered path showed. Tom estimated its weight at fully three hundred pounds.

"Enough to have made the wind whistle round a body's kilts," observed Sandy.

"Well, sufficient for the day are the surprises thereof," rejoined Tom, as they struck out once more. But to his astonishment, the surprises of that day were not at an end just yet. The three boys reached the bungalow at dusk, and their first inquiry was for the professor. They wished to have his advice concerning the incident of the

bowlder, for after discussing the matter in all its bearings they had come to a unanimous conclusion that no accident had sent it crashing across their path.

To their amazement, however, no professor was there. They waited supper for him for an hour or more, till Jasper tore his scanty wool, over the chilling pancakes, but no professor appeared.

"Whatever can have become of him?" wondered Jack. "He's not the kind of man to remain away unless there's something serious."

But, speculate as they would, the boys could come to no definite conclusion. One thing was certain, the professor was not there, and Jasper, on being questioned, said that although the German scholar had set out early, he had taken no lunch with him. This seemed to indicate that he had intended to be home to the noon meal, and made his continued absence all the more alarming.

Supper was eaten almost in silence, only one topic occupying the boys' minds. After the meal had been disposed of with scant appetite, except

on Sandy's part, Jack suggested that they should build a bonfire outside the bungalow, so that in case the amateur entomologist was lost he could see the red glow against the sky and be guided home by it.

This was hailed as a good idea, and a great pile of brush and dry wood was collected by the boys and piled near the lake front. They had no difficulty in finding enough dry combustible fuel, as the long drought that had prevailed had dried everything in the woods to the inflammability of tinder.

On this account Tom warned the others to be careful of flying sparks or embers, which might set the woods on fire. He knew that once they were kindled no power short of a miracle could stop the destructive sweep of the flames.

No such accident occurred, however, with such care did the boys watch their fire. For hour after hour they burned it, till shortly before midnight Tom decided that in another hour it might as well be allowed to die out. Before this, however, great

armfuls of wood were heaped on it, so that it would not be totally black before dawn.

It was a weird sight—this midnight watch-fire. The lake and the cliff opposite were crimsoned by the flames till they were dyed a blood-red hue, and above them the sky, too, turned crimson with the glare. The boys' anxious faces, and Jasper's troubled ebony countenance bore the same tinge.

"If he's anywhere within miles, he must see it," said Jack.

"Yes, if he hasn't fallen and been injured," said Tom, in a worried tone; "in such event in this wild part of the country it might be weeks before we could find him."

"Weeks," shouted Sandy, in a sharp tone, and the next instant gave a startled yell.

His exclamation had been repeated, but in a deep, mournful tone.

"W-e-e-ks."

"Who's that?" asked Tom sharply, in a voice that showed that the anxiety of the night watch had strained his nerves.

"Who's that?" came back the mysterious voice, and at the same instant Tom broke into a hearty gust of laughter.

"What are you laughing at?" snapped Sandy, in a rather loud voice. It annoyed him to see Tom treating his scare so lightly.

"Why, you chump, it's an echo," exclaimed Tom. "Hark!"

"Hark!" came back the voice.

"It's flapping back from that cliff opposite, and—why, where's Jasper?"

"Heah Ah is, Massa Tom," came a timid voice, seemingly smothered under some incumbrance; "is dem Injuns still comin'?"

"What Indians, you idiot?" laughed Tom; "it's an echo."

"An egg what?" asked Jasper, crawling from under the woodpile, where he had secreted himself as Sandy's voice had been repeated in such an uncanny way.

"Egg nothing," laughed Tom; "an echo——"

"Oh, an E-K-O echo, Massa Tom," stuttered Jasper, much relieved. "Do you know, sah, Ah

suspected it was one of dem conflustibus E-K-O's. Dem's po'ful Voodoo t'ings is dem E-K-O's, though. One time down in Cah'linah mah sister's cousin—— Fo' de Lawd's sake, wha' dat?"

"What's what?"

Tom gazed in the direction in which the negro was pointing—a small promontory of rock jutting into the lake a short distance above the bungalow.

"Ah seen sumfin' standin' on dat rock yondah and a-watchin' us," declared the negro solemnly.

"Something—what do you mean—an animal?"

"No, sah, dis wasn't no ambimals—dis was a man, or sumfin' looked lak one. It stood dar dis away"—Jasper drew himself up and folded his arms, sinking his chin forward on his breast—"dat's de way it was a-lookin' at us; yes, sah, jes dat a-way."

"Oh, nonsense, Jasper, you're seein' things," exclaimed Tom impatiently; "what you need is a——"

"Hullo!"

The shout came from the summit of the cliff opposite to them, or so it seemed.

“HULLO!”

Again the cry rang across the fire-lit waters of the lake.

“Who’s there?” shouted Tom, cupping his hands to his mouth.

“Der Herr Professor alretty!” came the unexpected answer, mingling with the echo’s mournful voice.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SECRET OF THE CLIFF

"Hurray!" shouted three young voices, while in the background old Jasper, forgetting his scare, clasped his hands and murmured "Bress de Lawd! Bress de Lawd!"

By more shouting the boys located the professor's position, and Tom and Jack embarked in one of the canoes to bring him across the lake. For, though how he reached there they could not guess, the Teuton was on the cliff summit. Sandy was left behind to guard the fire, it being considered dangerous to leave it unwatched.

The professor, after some difficulty, found a spot at the northerly extremity of the cliff in which there was a small cleft, down which he scrambled from the summit to the canoe. He was soon in it, and after they reached the bungalow

and he had eaten a warm meal he began an account of his adventures during the day. It soon developed that they had been more remarkable even than the boys'.

After spending some time on the near side of the lake, the professor had spied a butterfly with green wings and a pink body, to which he applied a scientific name of some length—much too long to be quoted here. The insect, however, proved a provoking flitter. It settled on a bush on the marge of the lake, and finally, just as the plump butterfly hunter was about to pop his net over its head, it skimmed gracefully off across the water.

The professor, nothing daunted, got into one of the canoes and started off in pursuit of it. Arrived on the opposite side of the lake, the provoking creature sat with its wings folded on an alder-bush, just as if inviting pursuit. The doughty professor simultaneously tumbled out of his canoe muttering:

“I ged you-you-you—insecdt, or bust in der attempdt.”

Hot as the day was, the savant toiled up the steep cliff after the insect, which ever flitted alluringly just ahead, and finally, in this way he reached the hilltop without realizing what a distance he had traversed. On and on through the pine woods to the summit of the cliff, the green winged insect led its devotee, always hovering just out of reach and urging on the Herr Professor to fresh endeavors. At last in a rage he hurled his net at it with an exclamation of:

“Pottsau fiend!”

As the butterfly net whizzed through the air it struck a bush and then seemed to vanish. The professor was about to start after it, when the sound of approaching footsteps made him halt. Luckily, as things turned out afterward, his plump body was screened by a tree trunk, and he presently saw something that, to quote him literally, “Made his insides out turn.”

A young man dressed much in the manner of any summer visitor to the woods was coming toward him, whistling a tune to himself. The professor was about to emerge from his tree and ask

his way, for he had wandered so far that he had lost all sense of location, when the young man as he reached the alder-bush suddenly *dropped out of sight*.

"I rub my eyes," the professor told the boys, "vunce, twice, drei times. But I see nothing. Vun moment he is dere, der next he iss notd. Abder vat you dink of dot?"

"Hoot, he moost be a cousin of Mister Fire Crackers," suggested Sandy.

"Budt, boys, vot subrise me der most iss dat I am villin' to swear dot dat feller vot drop oud of sighd is der same as der feller vot gif me der badt five-dollar note by der train."

This was indeed a surprising piece of news, but there was even more startling information behind it. The professor continued his narrative, which we shall divest of his dialect for the benefit of our readers.

"Well, I rubbed my eyes, as I said, to make sure I had not been dreaming," he went on, "but no—there was the wood, there were the same

trees, and there was that butterfly, still dancing about as if to irritate me.

“ ‘Ah-ha!’ I said to myself, ‘there is some hocus-pocus here; I will investigate it.’ With this object I walked forward and found my net sticking in the alder-bush just about where the young man vanished; but to my amazement, just as I seized it and was about to start back in the direction I judged the cliff lay, the ground under my feet began to tilt—yes, literally TILT, and before I could recover my balance I found myself slipping and sliding into a dark, damp-smelling place, evidently underground. On both sides of me, by extending my hands I could feel walls, but in front of me I could not by my utmost exertions perceive anything but black vacancy.

“The violence of my fall had been broken by my landing on what felt like a flight of steps, and no doubt had I been familiar with the place I might have landed right on my feet when the trapdoor swung open. As you may imagine, I now had no doubt that I had entered this strange place by the same means as had suddenly swal-

lowed the young man before my eyes. For this reason, although I had matches, I didn't dare to strike one, at any rate till I was sure he was not lurking in the vicinity.

"Finally, however, after I had waited what seemed to be whole eternities in the darkness without hearing a sound but the beating of my heart, I ventured to strike a match.

"Its 'snap' as I struck it seemed in that confined space as loud to me as a cannon, but as no hostile results followed, I concluded that whoever was in the tunnel must be some distance away. My match showed me that I stood in a space about three feet wide, by seven feet high, from which at one end a flight of rough steps led up to what I had no doubt was the trapdoor by which I had made my involuntary entrance. I examined it carefully, but could find no bolt or spring by which to open it, and you can imagine my feelings when I realized that I was a prisoner in a cave of some sort, which, for all I knew, was occupied by men of desperate character.

"As I had guessed, the darkness before me

proved to be a stairway, a continuation of the one leading up to the door above me. It seemed to lead downward, though for how far I could not, of course, guess. It had taken most of my supply of matches to furnish light for this investigation, and I now found myself facing the additional discomfort of being left in this strange place in total darkness. I used almost my last means of illumination in a desperate effort to open the trapdoor by which I had tumbled into the place, but with all the ingenuity I could muster I could not find the means of swinging it open which I knew must exist.

“One thing, however, I did find, that gave me more delight than almost anything except freedom could have done, and that was a small piece of candle placed in a niche of the wall. I soon lighted this, and then had one match remaining in my pockets. With the candle lighted I renewed my attack on the door, but it still withheld its secret from me, and I found myself forced to consider three alternatives.

“If I stayed where I was, some one might come

along. But that they would be the sort of people I wanted to meet I very much doubted.

"In the second place I could go forward down the staircase.

"In the third place, I could shout for help.

"I decided to adopt the second of these alternatives and started forward holding my candle high above my head. Its light shone on rock walls, seemingly of great antiquity and which, as the stairway declined, grew wet and beaded with moisture. The air, too, grew chilly and oppressive. However, I had started, and I was not—for the honor of the fatherland—going to turn back, and I kept on. Although this takes some time to describe, I probably was not walking in this subterranean causeway for more than five minutes before I heard a sound that made my heart almost stop beating.

"It was a steady 'Thump-thump-thump!' as if some one were beating with an axe on hard rock. I could see, too, directly in front of me, the red glare of a fire, apparently, or at any rate of some flaring light. I had hardly made this discovery

before a still more alarming thing than this happened.

"I heard footsteps approaching me from the direction of the glow. Some one was coming toward me down the passage!

"I blew out my candle and shrank against the wall of the passage, which grew wider at this point, and prayed that whoever was coming might not discover me, for I was sure now that the men who were producing that queer 'Thump-thumping' sound were up to no good purpose. Seemingly my prayer was answered, for just as the oncoming man approached me he stumbled, and his candle dropped and was extinguished. He seemed familiar with the passage, for he strode on for some paces before relighting it, and was then well past me.

"I saw that my only chance of escape was to follow him, and so at a good distance I crept behind. When he reached the space below the door he touched a lever of some kind which was hidden high in the wall where I had not seen it, and a second later the door swung open and he

emerged. I wished I could have followed him, but to have done so would be to have discovered myself, so I waited a few minutes to make sure he was not about to return, and then, lighting my candle once more with my last match, I searched for the lever in the place I had seen him reach for it. To my delight the chill of cold steel met my fingers, and as I drew the handle toward me the trap swung open as obediently for me as it had for him. A few seconds later I stood once more in the wood.

“My position, however, was still critical, for I was hopelessly lost, and had no idea how to find my way back. In addition, I was extremely hungry and faint. My first care was of course to put a good distance between myself and the mysterious cave, and my next to try to ascertain my whereabouts. I struck out in what I thought was the right direction, and, to make a long story short, wandered about till nightfall. Then I saw the glare of your fire, after I had awakened from a troubled sleep, and—here I am alretty.”

CHAPTER XIV

THE LETTER WRITER AGAIN

The amazement which the professor's narrative created in the minds of the boys may be imagined. Not the least strange part of his story was that which concerned the man who had passed the counterfeit note in the train on the banks of the Hudson River. Even the most lively speculation was unable to supply a link which would assign a plausible cause for his presence in the mountains of Maine, and in the remarkable cave which the lads' elder had discovered in such an extraordinary fashion.

"I've an idea that there is one man hereabouts who could aid us in this maze," said Tom, at length.

"Who?" asked Jack eagerly.

"Why, our mysterious friend, as I suppose we must call him for lack of a better name."

"You dink, den, dot dat fire-gracker mans as MacTaffish calls him, is friendly to you?" inquired the professor, who had been made acquainted with the day's events as encountered by the boys.

"Well, in the lack of evidence to the contrary, his actions certainly seem to be friendly enough," rejoined Tom. And soon after, as it was long past midnight, the little assemblage broke up.

Tired as he was, however, Tom did not sleep well. He woke by fits and starts, and his intervals of slumber were vexed by strange dreams, in which Sam Hartley, the cave, and the huge boulder that had menaced their lives seemed inextricably mixed up. During one of his wakeful intervals something occurred which brought him to a sitting posture with a bounding heart. After a moment of close attention, Tom leaped out of bed and ran to the window, the revolver which had been given him by Jared Fogg clutched tightly in his hand.

"Who's there?" he demanded, in a sharp tone.

There was not a sound to answer him but the murmur of the night wind in the pines and the soft tinkling of wavelets against the shores of the lake.

"I'm getting as nervous as a kitten," said the boy to himself, and was preparing to get back into bed, when suddenly he stopped dead once more, every nerve on the alert.

"Crack!"

Again came the sound. It must have been caused by a snapping twig outside the house somewhere; yet although the moon had by this time risen, the boy on a second survey from the window could see nothing. For some moments more he kept up his vigil, and then, as nothing more occurred to mar the quietude of the night, he resumed his efforts to slumber. Toward dawn he fell into a troubled doze, from which he awakened to find that it was broad day, with a cloudy, overcast sky. His brother had already dressed and left the room, and Tom made haste to follow him. He slipped on his bath robe preparatory

to a plunge in the lake, but on his way there Jack stopped him. The younger lad's face bore a look of anxiety.

"I didn't want to wake you, Tom," he said, "and so came downstairs without rousing you. The first person I met was Jasper, and he handed me this. He says he found it stuck onto the framework of the kitchen door."

"This" was a folded piece of paper, similar to the one that had been affixed to the window of the boys' room during the night they stayed at Jared Fogg's house.

Tom opened it hastily, his brother's anxious look mirrored on his countenance as he did so. Yet he was hardly surprised at the contents of the note. Somehow, he had half expected something similar when his brother handed it to him.

"Waz i rite?" it read; "u see now that ther is trubel ahed fer you. That stone was ment ter scare you. Nex time death will come closer."

"Well," said Tom, giving a low whistle after he had perused this masterpiece of composition, "it begins to look, after all, as if that was no idle

jest of whoever pinned that warning to our window at the Cross Roads. Have you told Sandy or the professor of this?"

"No, and I cautioned Jasper to say nothing about it."

"That's good; it's no good scaring them. I only wish we knew if that rapid-fire person was a friend or an enemy. Somehow, I have a feeling that despite his foolish manner there's a lot of good horse sense behind his eccentricities."

"That's my idea, too. Are you going to keep the note?"

"Yes. But first I'm going to take my dip. Come on."

Soon the two boys were splashing about in the cool water, and emerged to breakfast with shining eyes and glowing skins. Altogether, they looked like the last persons in the world whom one would imagine to be hemmed about by a net of strange mystery. After the meal the two brothers left the professor and Sandy to sort out some specimens while they adjourned to the back doorway to try to pick up some clue to their mys-

terious visitor of the night before, for that the sounds which had awakened Tom were caused by the person who had put the note on the kitchen door they did not doubt.

The ground was hard and rocky, however, and their investigations were not rewarded by anything more definite than a vague footprint or two, which told them nothing.

"I've a good mind to go to Trulliber and ask him right out if he or any of his outfit are responsible for this," exclaimed Tom indignantly, "that at least would clear the atmosphere."

"No use tipping off our hand," counseled Jack, but as he spoke the boys were both startled by hearing a voice behind them. That it was the voice of the individual of whom they had been talking did not lessen their surprise.

"Good morning," said Nate Trulliber, in a tone which he evidently took some pains to make pleasant; "a gloomy day, isn't it? I hope you slept well last night?"

"Why, no," said Tom; "the fact is, we didn't. I thought I heard some one prowling about the

house last night, and I came mighty near putting a charge of lead in his carcass."

Nate's look of surprise astonished the two boys. It seemed perfectly genuine.

"What!" he exclaimed, "some one round the house? Your cook, I reckon, out after chickens."

"This was not the cook," said Tom sternly, and looking Trulliber straight in the eye; "it was some one with a different purpose. Some one who wished to warn us that there would be trouble for us if we remained here, and——"

"WHAT?" fairly roared Trulliber, who, indeed, seemed affected by the news, but in quite a different manner to that which the boys had expected. "Some one's been tipping you off to—but that's queer, now, ain't it, boys?" he remarked, dropping his voice to an ordinary tone.

Trulliber went on to try to elicit from the boys some more details of their nocturnal visitor, but neither of them gave him any further information.

"Well," he said, at length, "I've got to be going. I just dropped over to give you folks these."

He exhibited a string of fresh trout. "My boy caught them this morning, and they're lively yet. Thought you'd like 'em."

"Thank you," said Tom, as the man strode off at his accustomed slouching gait; "it was very thoughtful of you."

But to Jack's astonishment, as soon as Trulliber vanished Tom called Jasper and handed him the fish.

"Throw these in the garbage pile or some place, Jasper," he said.

"Yas, sah," obeyed the cook; "but it does seem a shame ter t'row away such um-gum-glorious trouters as dese yar."

"Never mind; do as I tell you," ordered the boy.

"What in the world did you do that for?" asked Jack, who had been anticipating a feed of trout.

"I'm taking no chances with anything that Mr. Nate Trulliber gives us," rejoined Tom enigmatically. "What's that line in Virgil? We've ground our brains over it often enough. 'Beware

of the Greeks bearing gifts.' Well, the same applies to the Trullibers."

"Just the same, it seems an awful waste," grunted Jack, only half convinced.

"Say, Tom," said the younger lad suddenly, "you spoke of some plan you had in mind yesterday, when we were wondering why Trulliber was willing to pay such a price for the place."

"Oh, yes, that reminds me," exclaimed Tom; "come on, Jack, we'll get Sandy and have a personally conducted tour of this bungalow."

"A tour of it?" inquired Jack.

"A search, then, if you like it better. We'll ransack it from cellar—if it has one—to garret, which it hasn't. I've meant to do it ever since we got here."

"But what do you expect to find?" asked Jack, "hidden treasure?" he added, with a laugh.

"Better than that," exclaimed Tom, with an enigmatic smile; "it's an idea that wants to be put into execution while it's warm."

"Let's go fishing; it's a dandy day for it—the wind is in the south, blows the bait to fishes'

mouth,' " suggested Jack, who thought that that occupation was much more to be desired than searching through the house in warm corners. But Tom's hand was firmly on his shoulder, and he whirled the younger lad about.

"Jack Dacre, you obey me," he laughed; "right about turn, forward march."

"What for?" gasped the astonished Jack.

"For the Leaden Key to Fortune and the Secret of the Dacre bungalow," rejoined Tom in grandiloquent tones.

CHAPTER XV

WHAT AN OLD DESK HELD

"Do you still suspect Trulliber of having placed that note on the rear door?" asked Jack, as the two passed into the house.

Tom shook his head.

"Frankly, I don't," he said. "It seemed to me that his surprise was genuine when he heard about it. He seemed more annoyed than anything else, that it had been put there. No, I don't think he had anything to do with it."

"Then who did?"

"That's all a part of the puzzle. I wish we could find some sort of a clue to its unraveling."

A short time later the three boys and the professor, to whom the plan had been unfolded, began a systematic search of the bungalow. Beginning in the cellar of the rustic abode, they

worked systematically upward till they reached a small room facing the south, and which by common consent had not been occupied. It had been Chisholm Dacre's room, and the boys felt a natural reluctance to occupy it. It had therefore remained untenanted and untouched except for a casual inspection, since the young bungalow dwellers had arrived.

Now, however, Tom determined to ransack it. The events of the last two days had combined to convince him that it was time that a determined effort was made to unravel the mysterious clause of the will. The professor's narrative, too, had given him a hint of the true state of affairs—a hint which he had not dared dwell upon for fear that it might prove wrong.

The room was furnished sparsely—even to bareness. An iron cot, a wash-stand of the simplest design, and a heavy oak desk, were about the only articles, if a strip of rag carpet be excepted, in it. Evidently Chisholm Dacre had been a man of simple tastes.

"Won't take long to search this," commented Jack.

The others agreed. Tom, who was nothing if not painstaking, started his investigation by examining the mattress carefully, then followed the pillow cases and the bedstead itself. Nothing rewarded the searchers, however, and an examination of the wash-stand and the desk was likewise unproductive of results.

"Well, I guess we've about exhausted the possible hiding places, unless we pull the place down," said Jack.

But Tom was not yet finished. With a small hammer he tapped the walls and the flooring, but failed to find a spot which by giving out an unusual sound would apprise them of a hiding place.

In the meantime the professor's attention had been attracted by a peculiar-looking fly which had flown in through the open window, and was buzzing loudly about the room.

"Ah-ha!" he exclaimed, "a *pedicitbus subroribus*"—or so the name sounded to the boys—"I must have him by my collection."

But the fly resisted the professor's most earnest endeavors to catch it, and the stout Teuton was about to give up his perspiring efforts when with a sudden final dart at his prey he capsized himself and went careering over against the desk. The force with which he had collided with the piece of furniture snapped off a bit of the ornamental fretwork from its front and resulted in raising a severe bump on his classical forehead. It was not the bump nor the crash, however, that sent a shout to Tom's lips as his eyes fell on the place where the bit of wood had been cracked off.

It was the glint of a small metal button hitherto concealed by the broken bit of wood, that caused the boy to slide across the floor to the desk like an acrobat making a stage entrance.

"Hurrray!" he shouted, as he pressed the knob.

The next instant his shout was echoed by the others, as in response to his touch a small drawer slid slowly out, moved by a secret spring.

The drawer was full of papers, and a minute later the boys, with their heads together, sat in a ring on the floor poring over them. There

were some insurance deeds, a few papers bearing on Chisholm Dacre's once-important shipping interests, and a package of letters tied with a blue ribbon, which the boys surmised were those of his dead wife, and handled with reverence.

A yellow fragment of thickish paper tied with a bit of prosaic string still remained to be examined. With a premonition that it contained something of deep importance to them, Tom carefully undid the wrapping. At first glimpse the paper was seen to be covered with writing, in a cramped, fine hand, and in ink that had faded to a light-brown with age. It was what was inscribed on it, however, that made the boys' eyes pop out of their heads with excitement.

"This is the record of the secret confided to me by Wactamassee, the last Indian of the tribe that once roamed the slopes of Katahdin. I wish to set it down here, that it was in return for a kindness I did him when he was grievously injured by a bear that he confided the secret to me. Heaven alone knows if I can ever use it, or of what use it would be to me, but to those who come after me it may prove THE LEADEN KEY to GOLDEN FORTUNE,—grant it may be so."

Hardly able to control his voice for excitement, Tom read on:

"Enclosed is a plan and key for the finding of the lost lead mine, formerly worked by the Indians of Katahdin, and which according to Wac-tamassee is still of fabulous richness. How this may be I do not know. To an old man like me, who has done with this earth and the things thereof, it matters little. I make this record so that my lawful heirs named in a testament deposited with Mr. Pennington, lawyer of Bangor, may profit by it, provided they have the astuteness to read the riddle aright.

"CHISHOLM DACRE.

"July 12th, 1889.

"Now for the enclosure," exclaimed Tom, undoing with trembling hands a package wrapped in waterproof silk which lay in the other paper. It was a plan traced in the same brown ink as the other document, and seemingly made at about the same time.

"Why," exclaimed Tom, as he examined its faded lines, "here's the lake, and this mark here inscribed 'cliff' must mean those cliffs opposite. Then right here is an arrow pointing to the

northwest that must mean in the direction of the entrance to this mine, wherever it is, and here is a square marked 'trapdoor.' Why—I have it—it's as plain as print," he broke off. "This is a map that almost reproduces the course taken by the professor. Professor, when you fell through that trapdoor yesterday you tumbled into our Leaden Key!"

"Donner blitzen, voss iss diss!" shouted the professor, while the boys joined hands and capered about him. "I found it a treasure, ain'd it, and don'd bring it away."

"You'd have had to be a Sampson to do that, professor," laughed Tom happily; "that is, if the mine is as rich as my uncle seemed to think. Why, the Leaden Key is a lead mine. How dense we were not to think of that before."

"Hurrah, we're all rich!" shouted Jack.

"Hoots, toots, here's a haggis!" exclaimed Sandy, executing a Highland fling with variations.

The impromptu celebration in old Chisholm Dacre's room kept up for a few minutes longer,

when suddenly Tom dashed the excitement somewhat by exclaiming:

"But we're not the first to discover it. There are others ahead of us. That much is clear, from the professor's story—that is, if it was *really* the mine he fell into."

"No doubt of that," said Jack, who had been examining the map in intervals of skylarking. "Look here, this trapdoor is marked below in script as 'concealed.' There could hardly be two places like that on this estate."

"But the men who are working your mine are trespassers if it is on your land," exclaimed Sandy. "Come on, we'll throw them out."

The impulsive Highland youth was starting for the door, as if he actually meant to put his intention into action, when Tom remarked thoughtfully:

"That's more easily said than done. In the first place, we don't know how long these fellows have been working the mine, and in the second place I am not sure about our legal rights. I believe there is some State law concerning the

finding of mineral claims which gives the finders the right to work them, no matter on whose land they may be."

The boys' hopes, a moment ago so high, were dashed almost to the ground by these words.

"We must consult Mr. Pennington," said Jack.

"Too late, he has started for England," rejoined Tom quickly. "No, it's up to us to win out on this single-handed."

A sudden shout from the professor cut short his further words. The German was pointing excitedly at the window. A shadow they had all noticed had rapidly crossed the casement.

"A spy!" shouted Jack, sprinting from the room, followed by the others.

But a search of the premises revealed no one, and the professor could give no definite description of the man whom he was certain he had detected in the act of peering in the window.

"He vos looging in like he vos seen it a spoog alretty," he said.

"The first thing to do," announced Tom, after the scare had subsided, "is to make a copy of this

plan and make all the speed we can to file the original in some safe place. It is all we have to show to make good our claim of being the heirs of the original discoverer of the mine."

A short time after, following a session of hard work with rubber and pencils, the boy, who was a skillful draughtsman for one of his limited experience, had completed a copy of the plan which they felt would be good enough for their purposes.

Next came the question of getting the original and the document connected with it consigned to some place of safety. All agreed that the best plan would be to have it conveyed to Bangor, that being the nearest large city. It could be deposited in some safe-deposit vault, till the boys had made further investigations into their strange discovery. That the secret of the old desk was not safe in the bungalow now became certain. In this light also a great many things that had hitherto been mysterious to them became plain as day.

The Trullibers and their "boarders" evidently had discovered the secret of the mine from fol-

lowing lonely old Chisholm Dacre on one of his expeditions to it. This seemed the most likely theory, and later the boys were to learn it was the correct one. The cubes of lead which had rolled out at the depot were doubtless samples of the product of the mine which had been sent to New York or some other point to be assayed.

One other puzzling point remained, and that was why, having had the rough product refined, it should have been reshipped to the men whom the boys now felt certain were working the lost Indian mine? To what purpose could they use it?

"Well, we can't bother over that now," decided Tom. "One thing is certain, we're near the end of the mystery now."

How far they were from the end of the labyrinth, and what they were to experience before they reached it, the boys were at that moment far from guessing. Had they been aware of what was in store for them, Tom might not have spoken so confidently, or the others have echoed his assurance.

"The thing to be done now," spoke Tom, after much excited talk, "is to get this plan and the paper to a safe place. There is only one way to do it, and that is by railroad."

"But the railroad is twenty miles away," objected Jack, "and we haven't got a horse."

"There is one other way of getting to a station," put in Tom, "and that is by the creek."

"By the creek?"

"Yes, below the flume it seems to be navigable, and, according to the map, I was looking at the other night, ought to bring you out somewhere near to the junction, where the Cross Roads branch joins the main line. The question is, who is to make the trip? Although it won't be one of more than fifteen miles, it's a rough cruise, and there's considerable risk of an upset."

"Well, I can swim," argued Jack; "it ought to be me. I'm the logical candidate, as the politicians say."

"And hoo aboot me?" questioned Sandy, "I'm a braw canoe man."

"Yes, the last time you were out on the Hudson

you came ashore in a launch, with the canoe towing behind," mocked Jack. "No, if any one's to go, it should be me."

The matter was finally adjusted by names being dropped into a hat and shuffled. A slip was then drawn by the professor, and the lot fell to "the logical candidate," as Jack had described himself. The professor at first made considerable objection to the idea of the boy making the trip, but when a map was produced and he was shown on it that the voyage was a feasible one, and should not occupy any great length of time, he became more amenable to the boys' wishes, and finally consented.

"Aber I dond't know vat der Herr Doctor Parsons wouldt say," he protested, as they vociferously thanked him for his consent.

"After all, professor," urged Tom, "Doctor Parsons would be one of the first to see the necessity for action. You know that self-reliance was the stuff he was always preaching, and here's a chance come right to us—on the fly—to show

how three boys can upset the plans of a gang of rascals."

"Dot's right," agreed the professor, "aber at Heidelberg I remember I would have done der same thing, just as quivick as I would haf fought a doodle."

After a hearty lunch, Jack equipped himself for his trip. In an inside pocket, wrapped in waterproof covering, he carried the precious package. Besides this he had matches in a waterproof box, a small hatchet, and a shotgun. He also took provisions enough to last him in case of an emergency, for although the map said that the creek was navigable, it was by no means certain that he would not have to abandon the canoe and finish his journey on foot. The return trip was to be made by Norton's Cross Roads, at which place he would get Jared Fogg to drive him back.

It was also arranged that while in Bangor the boy was to see Mr. Pennington's law partner and consult him as to their best plan of action. These arrangements concluded, the boys carried

the canoe in which the trip was to be made to the lower side of the dam, that ages before had formed the lake, and with hearty handclasps the younger Dacre boy embarked on his perilous journey. The last they saw of him he was shooting skillfully round a clump of birches, which a second later shut him out from the view of his friends.

CHAPTER XVI

A FIGHT—AND ITS RESULT

Later that afternoon Jasper confided that his larder was low, and that some fresh fish for supper would be acceptable.

"Dose trouts dat Massa Trubbler done brung would have done fus' rate," he sighed, thinking of the fate of the speckled beauties Tom had peremptorily ordered thrown away.

"Never mind, Jasper," Tom assured him, "I'll bring you home the biggest 'trouts' you ever set those china eyes of yours on. I'm going to catch Jumbo."

"Cotch Jumbo! Fo' de Lawd's sake, Massa Tom, Ah done said I wanted feesh fer supper, not elingfants."

"Who said anything about elephants?" exclaimed Tom, with a laugh, as he reached up in

the rack and got down his favorite rod, a split bamboo whose brown joints and faded wrappings spoke of long service.

"Why yo' done said yo' goin' ter cotch Jumbo, Massa 'Tom, an' any pusson knows dat Jumbo is der culumphoristist elingfant in de wide worl'."

"Jumbo in this case is a fish," laughed 'Tom, "the biggest trout you ever saw, Jasper," he explained, "and Jumbo the elephant is dead long ago."

"Lawd's sake, Massa 'Tom, dat so? Well, well, I remembah when Ah was a pickininni savin' up mah pennies in de hope dat some day dat mons'rous elingfant come ter town."

'Tom reached the fishing hole in which the huge trout lurked at about mid-afternoon. To his astonishment, however, he was not the only fisher there that day. Seated on the fallen log from which he had tumbled so ingloriously, and on which Nate Trulliber had seated himself while he made his proposition to buy the Dacre estate, was a lumbering-looking youth, with a crop of untidy hair, whose long limbs were covered with

tattered, faded overalls, and whose feet were encased in a pair of clumsy cowhide boots.

"Good afternoon," greeted Tom pleasantly, although he had no idea who the stranger could be; "fishing for the big trout?"

The other, whose visible fishing apparatus consisted of a hazel pole, a string, and a cork float, nodded surlily.

"Yep," he said; "goin' ter git him, too."

Tom said nothing, but made ready his tackle, bending on two flies which he kept for special occasions. As he prepared to make a cast, the other growled in a surly tone:

"Wot yer goin' ter do?"

"Why," said Tom, in some surprise, "I should think that was plain enough; I'm going to try for Jumbo—that big trout."

"He's my fish, I tell yer. Keep away frum here, will yer?"

Tom was so astonished at this cool remark that for a moment he could not speak. Then the idea of being ordered off his own property struck him

in all its ludicrousness, and he burst into a hearty laugh.

"So you don't want me to spoil your sport, eh?" asked Tom.

"Naw, I don't. You'd better git away frum here—city feller."

This last was shot out with the ultimate inflection of contempt.

"Oh, I don't know," rejoined Tom, still coolly, but getting rather nettled at the other's truculent tone, "I suppose you know this is my land."

"Ho! ho! ho! that's a good un; wasn't I here first?"

Tom hardly knew whether to laugh or be angry at the situation. Here was an overalled interloper calmly telling him he had no right to fish on his own property. He resolved for the present to keep his temper, however. Suddenly the cork bait of the overalled fisherman bobbed under, and he struck his apparatus in a hurry. A tiny trout came wiggling up on his hook. He was about to take it off and run a willow withe through its gills, when Tom stepped forward.

"Here, you put that fish back," he ordered.

"Why?"

"It's under size, and you know it."

Tom was a thorough sportsman, and believed in playing the game according to rules. The overalled youth evidently belonged in another category.

"Wot ull yer say if I don't put it back?" he grinned provokingly.

"Why, I——" began Tom hotly, "I really don't know," he broke off, with a vexed laugh.

"Then I'll give yer a chance ter make up yer mind," drawled the other. "I ain't goin' ter put it back."

He lumbered to his feet and glared defiantly at Tom, who was now thoroughly aroused.

"Put that fish back," he ordered.

"I won't, and you can't make me," pugnaciously announced the tousled youth, who, now that he stood erect, was seen to be a good head taller than Tom, and built like a young bull. Tom saw that if the matter came down to brass tacks he was going to have real trouble on his hands.

He was not the boy to flinch, however, when he felt there was a matter of duty involved.

"I can't make you, eh?" he demanded angrily.

"Naw, and here's to show you you can't."

The hulking youth, without the slightest warning, sprang at the other lad with surprising agility for one of his bulk, and planted a staggering blow on his shoulder. It had been aimed for the jaw, but Tom, with the instinct of the practiced boxer, had avoided it even as it was aimed.

Before he had time to recover himself, the hulking youth flung aside his primitive rod and rushed on the Bungalow Boy. Tom tried to fling his rod aside, but it was caught in the onrush and trampled underfoot. The spectacle of his favorite rod reduced to a heap of useless splinters roused the boy to the highest pitch of anger, and, fighting warily, he prepared to give the other the lesson of his young life—if he could.

Tom soon saw that his opponent had been raised in the rough-and-tumble school of fisticuffs, and he had no difficulty in avoiding his furious and unscientific rushes. On the other

hand, however, the overalled youth had no tactics to which he could resort to avoid Tom's cleanly planted blows. The Audubon boy, marshaling all his cleverness and resource, drove his opponent steadily back till his clumsy boots tramped the grass almost at the edge of the deep pool.

"Had enough?" asked Tom, as he planted a skillful right hook full on the other's nose with a force that made a whole series of constellations appear to the other's view, while water poured from his eyes.

Tom's opponent shook his head like a shaggy young bull in reply, and made another furious rush. Tom met the onslaught quietly, determined to end the battle as soon as possible. Ducking and avoiding the other's wild right and left swings, he drove a terrific blow full for the point of the overalled youth's jaw. It landed with a crash that sounded like an axe felling an aged oak, and the pugnacious fisherman was raised a few inches from the ground. Waving his arms wildly, as though clutching for some support, he toppled backward, and before Tom, who sprang

forward to seize him, could save him, the overalled youth plunged with a prodigious splash into Jumbo's pool.

But at the same instant Tom felt a terrific blow on the back of his head.

The trees, the pool, the suddenly immersed boy, all swam in a wild arenic performance before his eyes for one sickening second, and then he plunged forward and lay prone on the ground.

"Just in time, it seems," muttered a gruff voice, as Nate Trulliber, who had dealt the cowardly blow, stooped over the fallen boy.

In the meantime the overalled youth had scrambled from the pool, and now stood dripping on the bank.

"Well, Jeff, if I'd known you couldn't put up a better fight than that I'd have drowned you with that last litter of pups," remarked Nate, his eyes resting disapprovingly on his son, for it was the Trulliber offspring whom Tom had given such an impressive lesson in the art pugilistic.

"Aw, he didn't play fair," grumbled Jeff, wiping his bleeding nose and wringing the water out

of his garments. "He dodged all my punches, and——"

"You stopped all his," grimly finished his father. "I was watching you. Now, the question is," he went on, "what to do with this young cub. He's knocked still and cold for a while, that's certain, and from what I saw this morning when I peeped in that window, I rather think we can use him up at home. Here, Jeff, you lay hold of his feet. I'll take his head. Easy, now. That's the way."

As carefully as if he had not just dealt him a murderous blow, Nate Trulliber lifted Tom's head. The boy's eyes were closed, and his face was deadly pale. As Nate had said, he was indeed "knocked out." No instinct of pity, however, filled the hearts of either of the Trullibers.

"Say, pop, that's a nice watch-chain he has, and I'll bet there's a fine gold watch on the end of it," said the younger Trulliber, as he laid hold of Tom's limp limbs.

The elder Trulliber guessed his hopeful son's thought.

"Well, we'll see about that later," he said; "but I'm disappointed in you, Jeff—very, very disappointed."

With these words the two picked up the senseless lad and started off up the trail with him, in the direction of the abandoned lumber camp.

But the 'Trullibers' were not the only feet that trod the rocky path. Close behind them, and creeping stealthily as an Indian, came the figure of Sam Hartley, the cave-dweller.

CHAPTER XVII

TOM A PRISONER

When Tom opened his eyes he found himself in an environment so strange that it was some time before he could collect his thoughts and realize all that had happened in the last few minutes, or hours, he did not know which. His head felt queer and giddy, and his eyes saw dimly when he first opened them, but in time he grew more used to his surroundings, and could marshal them accurately in his mind. His first attempt to move showed him he was bound hand and foot.

He was lying on a heap of blankets—horse blankets, by the decidedly unpleasant odor, in a dark building that was empty of both furniture and humanity. Judging by its unceiled roof and rough walls, it appeared to be an outbuilding of some sort. That it immediately adjoined an-

other, and an inhabited structure, however, was soon made evident by the sound of voices in a room near at hand.

The boy recognized Trulliber's gruff tones, but the other voices were strange to him.

"Well, now we've got ourselves in a nice mess," he heard Trulliber saying. "First thing you know we'll be arrested and charged with murder."

"Nonsense," rejoined the other. "I fixed the ground about the pool so as to any searchers it will look as if the boy had tumbled in and had been drowned. Any one would suppose it was an accident, and I'll bet you anything you like that the boy's friends will conclude so."

"But what are we to do with the boy, now we've got him? He'll be a regular elephant on our hands. I only wish that cub Jeff had knocked him into the pool in reality and drowned him."

This cheerful aspiration came from Nate Trulliber.

"All we've got to do is to keep him under cover till we're ready to clear out," the other voice reassured the black-bearded Nate, "and then we'll

turn him loose. By that time his friends will have left the place, believing him drowned, and we'll be far over the border into Canada before any one can pick up our trail."

"By George, Dan Dark, you've hit it right, as usual," Tom heard Trulliber say, with an admiring inflection. "As it so happens, then, things have turned out for the best, after all. And now let's see that plan you took off the boy."

This last informed Tom of something of which he had hitherto not been aware.

The rascals in whose power he was had gone through his pockets while he lay unconscious, and had taken what they deemed was the plan of the mine. Critical as was his situation, he almost chuckled to himself as he realized how badly they were fooled. If all was going well, Jack should by this time be well on his way to the junction with the original document, proving incontestably the Dacre boys' right to the lost Indian lead mine,—in so far as it lay in their uncle's power to will it to them.

Another voice now struck into the talk—one

he had not heard before. The boy started as in its tone he caught something that was familiar, though for the life of him he could not recollect where he had heard it before.

"You're both wrong," said this new voice; "you mark my words you are. As sure as my name is Mark Ingalls, you're on the high road for trouble. The kidnaping of this boy was the most foolish thing you ever did."

Mark Ingalls! The boy knew now why the voice had sounded familiar. It was that of the left-handed smith of Norton's Cross Roads.

"There you go again with your fears and doubts," sneered Trulliber, "and as for swearing by 'Mark Ingalls,' why not use your real name, and——"

"Here, stow that," rejoined the other. "You know well enough that when I took my little daughter and came back here into the wilds I never thought I'd see any of the old gang again."

"But we astonished you, eh?"

"Ay, that you did, and if I hadn't been a weak fool I wouldn't have entered into your schemes;

but, Heaven help me, I had no more strength of mind than to aid you to the best of my ability."

"For old time's sake," Trulliber finished for him. "Now, look here, Mark Ingalls, no psalm-singing here. We know you too well. Why, wasn't it you that helped, after we had found this charming spot, to find out what old Dacre was up to?"

The listening boy heard the man lumber to his feet and from the sounds it appeared as if he crossed the room rapidly, probably with a sinister purpose, so far as the smith was concerned. But the other voice now struck in.

"Here, no quarreling. Anyhow, Mark suggested scaring them out of the valley by rolling down that big boulder on them."

"Right you are, Dan Dark," assented Trulliber. "I let my temper get the best of me. Anyhow, a few days more ought to see us work out what's left of the mine. By the way, do you reckon Trimmers will have made the Cross Roads in time for that early Bangor train?"

"I guess Trimmers is another of the gang,"

thought the boy. "Wonder what he's going traveling for, and on the same train as Jack ought to make?"

"He'll make it, with time to spare," grunted the man addressed as Dan Dark. "And now let's take a look at the boy. He ought to have come to by this time."

Tom, however, had no intention of letting the crafty rascals find out that he had overheard such an important conversation. As they rose with a scraping of chairs, and he heard them approaching, he closed his eyes and lay perfectly still. The effect of the knockout blow Trulliber had given him was still marked enough to give his cheeks a waxen pallor, so that to any one viewing him he looked almost like one dead.

Presently he felt that the men were bending over him, and could smell the rank odor of the kerosene lamp they carried.

"Say, Nate," said Dan Dark, in some alarm, "you don't think you gave him too hard a tap, do you?"

Trulliber bent over the boy and felt his pulse.

If he had had more than a primitive knowledge of such things, he could have told by its wild fluttering that Tom was very much awake, but as it was he straightened up again well satisfied.

"He's alive, all right," he said, "and to judge by the strength of his pulse he'll soon be out of it."

With these words Trulliber, followed by Dan Dark, left the shed.

"Poor lad," the boy heard the man he knew as Mark Ingalls say, in a low undertone, "he looks as white as death. When I think of what he did for my kid, I'd—but what's the use."

Mark Ingalls turned away and followed the others. Not a bad man at heart, he was a weak one. Formerly a member of the gang of which Trulliber and his companions were leading spirits, he had reformed some years before and brought his little daughter to that wild part of Maine, to remain in hiding for the rest of his life. But as those who sow the wind inevitably reap the whirlwind, his misdeeds had followed him. When in searching for a quiet spot Trulliber and

his followers had hit upon the abandoned lumber property on Sawmill Creek, almost the first person they had stumbled across had been their old companion, Mark Ingalls. He was too useful to them to allow him to be unmolested, so they had persuaded him to rejoin the band.

More in the hope of reaping a fortune for his little daughter than for his own ends, he had consented.

As my readers may have guessed, Trulliber and his gang had another mission in Maine than locating lost mines. In fact, as has been hinted, they stumbled across Chisholm Dacre's secret only by a mere chance. What their mission was in the wilds, and in what nefarious traffic they were engaged, we shall soon learn.

Tom lay for some time revolving the situation in his mind. Bound hand and foot as he was, he knew it would be useless to attempt an escape, and from what he had overheard the others saying, it seemed that his friends were likely to believe that he had been drowned accidentally and to abandon any idea of searching for him.

He knew that Trulliber would spare no effort to create that impression, unless Tom should escape and frustrate the plans of the leader of the gang.

It was plain enough now, from what he had overheard, that almost from the first they had been tracked, and that every effort had been made to keep them from the bungalow and its surroundings. In fact, it appeared that, as they had guessed, the dislodged boulder had been a deliberate attempt on their life.

There still remained one unsolved factor in the riddle that surrounded him, and that was the identity of the man who had saved them from the peril just referred to, and who the boy could not figure out other than as X, the unknown quantity.

Had he possessed the ability to see through solid walls, he would have been still more at a loss to decipher the exact position of Mr. X, as he mentally termed Sam Hartley, in the puzzle.

For at that very moment that same Sam Hartley stood outside Tom's prison, and with one of the implements comprised in a wonderful knife,

containing everything from "a pin to a plough-share," was engaged in painstakingly boring a peep-hole.

CHAPTER XVIII

GONE!

“Well, here I am, tied hand and foot,” thought Tom, “and, so far as I can figure out, all I can do is to wait and see what happens to me. They don’t mean to finish me off, that’s one comfort.”

For several minutes the boy lay silent in his dark place of captivity, thinking of his brother and wondering how his journey was progressing. More than ever he congratulated himself on his foresight in making a duplicate copy of the key-route to the mine. Now that Trulliber had taken the copy from him, Tom felt satisfied that they believed they had relieved the Bungalow Boys of all knowledge of its whereabouts. The talk the boy had overheard, too, made it almost certain that the gang had no knowledge of the visit of the professor to the subterranean tunnel.

All at once a sudden sound startled him.

"Hi-ss-s-t!"

The cautious hissing signal seemed to proceed from the wall close to him, but the boy waited a second or two before answering. He did not know but that it might be a trap of some sort. The next instant, however, his mind was relieved on that score, for the voice came again. This time it bore a definite message.

"Are you there, Tom Dacre?" it whispered, in cautious accents.

"This is Tom Dacre," rejoined Tom; "but who are you?"

"Sam Hartley," was the answer, with a chuckle. "I followed you up here from the time that skunk Mull—I mean Trulliber—knocked you over with that cowardly blow. I haven't been able to help you yet, but I may get a chance."

"Are you the same man who fished me out of the pool, and who warned us of that boulder?" questioned Tom.

"That's me," was the easy reply from the other, who Tom now perceived was outside the

wall of his prison and talking through the small hole he had bored.

"But you don't talk the same at all——"

"That's all right. I've got over my impediment in speech. I'll tell you all about it some time, after we have got these fellows in the net that is fast closing about them."

"Well, Sam Hartley," rejoined Tom, "I don't see what you can do to aid me. Here I am, tied hand and foot, and I guess pretty closely guarded."

"All except the roof," whispered Sam. "They forgot that. There's a ladder outside here, and when I get a chance I'm going to drop into the loft through a hole in the roof they were repairing, and take a chance on getting you out."

There was no chance for any further conversation, for at that moment Trulliber and the man he had addressed as Dan Dark took it into their heads to visit their prisoner once more. This time Tom thought it was useless to assume unconsciousness, and besides, he was hungry.

Somehow, Sam Hartley's talk had given him hope, and with hope had come appetite.

"Oh, so you're all right again?" remarked Trulliber, as he held his lamp high and gazed down at the boy. "That's good. I didn't mean to give you quite as hard a tap as I did, but in the excitement of the moment——"

"Never mind that," Tom cut in. "Now that you've got me here, give me something to eat."

"Well, I'm blowed," rejoined the other; "talks as if he was at home. Well, you won't have no cause to complain on the eating score while you are with us, youngster," he went on, "so long as you keep quiet till we turn you loose, you'll get the fat of the land. Dan, get the kid some grub."

Dan, grumbling somewhat at being ordered about, but obeying nevertheless, shuffled off to fulfill the other's order. While he was gone, Trulliber took the opportunity to try to pump Tom in regard to the boys' affairs, but did not succeed in getting anything out of him. Dan soon returned with a plate of bread and meat and a big pot of coffee. While Tom ate, his hands

were of course unfastened, and he was in hopes they might remain so, but to his chagrin his bonds were tied again as soon as he had finished a substantial meal.

"There's one consolation, I feel about a million times stronger," breathed the lad to himself, as he lay down again and listened to the retreating footsteps of his captors. "Now, I wish that Sam Hartley would appear again, for I feel like a little conversation."

But Sam Hartley did not reappear at the hole he had bored, and presently Tom dozed off. He was awakened with a start, to feel a hand on his shoulder.

Alert in an instant, the lad gazed up to see what new danger threatened him, but as he did so he heard reassuring words.

"It's me, Ingalls, the blacksmith," he heard, in a hoarse whisper. "Listen!"

* * * * *

It is now time to return to the bungalow and see how affairs were progressing with the professor and Sandy. Neither of the two had felt any

uneasiness concerning Tom until it grew near sundown.

With the setting of the sun and still no sign of Tom's return, their uneasiness grew into anxiety, and their anxiety into fear. Jasper was sent for and questioned.

"Where did Tom say he was going to fish?" asked Sandy.

"Why, he done say, sah, dat he wus boun' ter go an' catch a mons'us beeg feesh dat he called Jumbo, or some such umstrepulous name," responded the colored servitor.

"Vos iss dis Yumbo?" inquired the professor.

"Hoot mon, it's a troot o' unco' size," rejoined Sandy, who had heard from Tom of the big fish, on the morning that the three boys had encountered Nate Trulliber at the pool.

"Oh, a fishes," rejoined the professor. "Vell, dot don't help us at all, for der lake iss full of fishes."

"But this feesh lives in a big hole," replied Sandy.

"Voss you able to findt idt?"

"Nothing more easy, as the man said whin he rolled off the log; it's aboot a mile from here."

"Den come, ve must mak id all der haste ve can't," sputtered the professor. "Maybe ve findt him alretty before id iss too late yet."

"Well, come on, then," said Sandy. "Get the lantern and lead on; Jasper, you stay here and scare the bogles away."

"Don't talk 'bout nuffin' lak dem bogles—by which I suppose yo' intends to converberate ghostes," chattered Jasper. "Ah don' lak dem hants; no, sah, an' ef yo' leave me alone, I'm goin' ter lock dat door."

"Hoot, that'll nae keep oot a bogle," comforted Sandy. "Mon, they can creep through the unco'est hole you ever set eyes on."

"Vell, come, don'd let us vaste time in non-sensicalities," sputtered the professor. "Hurry by der oudside, and dond't drop der lamp."

It did not take the two searchers long to reach the side of the pool, and, once there, they commenced an active search for clues. As Dan Dark had said, he had made a good job of it. By the

edge of the pool he had placed Tom's hat, with the broken fishing rod beside it and half immersed in the water. To the horrified professor and the boy beside him, Tom's fate seemed as clear as daylight. He had stumbled into the pool and been drowned.

A terrible cry burst from Sandy's lips as he realized what he believed to be the terrible truth. As for the professor, he gritted his teeth firmly, and, producing a small pistol, he flourished it menacingly.

"Vot is by der insides of dis I keep for der teufels vot is responsible for all dis," he exclaimed fiercely.

"But, professor, puir Tom met with an accident, and there is none to blame for his death, muirs the pity," wailed the Scotch lad.

"Nefer mindt. I haf my own ideas," exclaim the irate Teuton, who had been looking about him. "Id look to me dot dere has been some confusion here. See, der grass is trambled quivdt a vays from der edge of der vater. Aber, if you

ask me, I should say dat dot poor lad vos pushed in."

"You think so?" gasped Sandy; "then, by the plaid of the McTavishes, I'll find the thieves that did it, an' it'll go unco' hard with them. Oh, Tom, if you were alive!"

"Well, what if he is?"

"Donnervetter, a ghost!" screamed the professor, flourishing his fat revolver at a figure which had just emerged with startling suddenness from the bushes.

"Don't shoot, professor," exclaimed Sam Hartley with a laugh, for it was the cave-dweller who had appeared. "I've come with good news."

"News of Tom?" gasped Sandy.

"Dot boy iss alife und vell—oh, Hoch der Kaiser!" shouted the professor, flourishing his pistol.

"Look out, professor," warned Sam Hartley, "you'll shoot yourself in the foot with that cannon if you're not careful. Yes, Tom is alive and well, and not two miles from here."

"Not two miles from here; vot iss he doing?"

sputtered the professor, thinking that perhaps this might, after all, be a peculiar sort of a joke.

“Why, the last I saw of him, which was rather a circumscribed view,” admitted Sam Hartley, “he was lying in a roll of blankets, and seemed to be going to sleep.”

In reply to the eager questions that rained on him, Sam soon put the others in possession of the facts in the case, and they agreed to accompany him to the neighborhood of the Trullibers, there to await a favorable opportunity to put into execution the plan of rescue Sam had already outlined to Tom.

It seemed a long time before the lights in the Trullibers' living house went out and all was ready for Sam to make his bold attempt.

“You lie close under cover behind those bushes,” he ordered, before he started his climb up the ladder, “and if you hear any sounds of trouble, don't interfere. It won't be the first time Sam Hartley's played a lone hand.”

From behind their leafy screen the professor and Sandy watched Tom's rescuer climb the lad-

der, and in the light of the moon, which had risen a short time before, they saw him cautiously clamber up the roof to the dark hole, through which he was presently to drop, and pause to reconnoitre. Evidently the coast was clear, for after a few seconds of this careful looking about him Sam Hartley's form vanished.

It seemed an eternity before he reappeared, but at last he did; and to the bitter disappointment of Sandy and the professor, he came alone. Rapidly he slid down the ladder, not waiting to use the rounds, and in a second more stood beside them.

"Where's Tom?" gasped Sandy.

"Gone!" answered the other, clearly at a loss to account for Tom's disappearance.

"Gone!" cried the Scotch boy. The professor echoed his exclamation of dismay.

"Clean as a whistle. I last saw him sleeping on the pile of blankets; but now they are empty."

"But——" began Sandy, and stopped suddenly.

Bang!

The discharge of a shotgun near at hand

startled even Sam Hartley from his accustomed composure.

“Well, what’s up now?” he exclaimed.

CHAPTER XIX

JACK IN TROUBLE

As the clump of birch trees shut out Jack Dacre from the eyes of his companions, the lad settled down to paddling, or rather steering, in good earnest. So fast did the creek flow below the natural dam of the little lake that he had little to do but to keep the canoe on a straight course and avoid damaging his craft on the rocks which in some places showed dangerously close to the surface of the water.

So rapid was his progress that at dusk he was within striking distance of his destination, although, as he knew, the train would not go through the junction till early morning. As there was a small settlement at the point, however, he determined to put up at the hotel for the night—provided there was one. If not, he concluded he

could get some sort of shelter. For in Maine, as in most parts of the world, money will purchase a night's shelter quicker than any other persuasion.

Musing thus, Jack almost ended his trip before it was fairly begun, for while thinking, he had relaxed his vigilance somewhat. Suddenly, right in front of the bow of his canoe, he saw a big black rock sticking up its rough and ugly form like the wet back of a whale. He gave a quick twist of the paddle and averted the peril of a spill, but his course now brought him almost upon another obstruction. The water began to run more rapidly, too, and break in showers of spray against the rocks which the boy now saw to his alarm were as numerous and thick as a flock of sheep.

He had reached a part of the stream, in fact, which was locally famed as the "Bunch of Grapes," owing to its resemblance to a cluster of that fruit in point of the rock formation.

"Whew! I'm in for it," exclaimed the boy to himself, bending every effort to controlling the

dancing canoe. But skilled with the paddle as he was, the rough and racing watercourse in which he now found himself was a stretch very unlike the placid waters of the Hudson, or even of some of the Western streams which he had navigated.

Jack Dacre was, in fact, in the midst of an almost inextricable labyrinth of rock-strewn rapids.

This way and that danced the light canoe, with the striving boy working desperately with his paddle to avert the calamity that seemed unavoidable.

He would have made for the shore if he could, but so fast did the water dash and roar among its imprisoning rocks that all he could hope to do was to hold the canoe on a course that would keep her from smashing to splinters on the rocks. To make matters worse, the water now began to toss itself high against the boulders, and showers of spray fell about him.

“Well, I’ve often read of shooting the rapids, but I never dreamed it was as tough a job as

this," thought Jack. "This is what comes of not keeping a bright lookout ahead."

Suddenly a voice from the shore hailed him. The boy glanced over his right shoulder, and saw some men running along the rocky bank and motioning to him violently. They evidently were trying to give him some instructions, but before the boy could comprehend them a sudden turn of events fully occupied his attention in another direction.

A black, gleaming rock, with smooth, water-worn sides, had—as it seemed to him—suddenly obtruded itself in his path during the interval he had momentarily allowed his attention to become diverted.

A shout of alarm broke from the boy's lips, and he gave his paddle a quick twist.

But the canoe, caught by the strong grasp of the current, failed to respond this time, and in a minute the fragile bark in which Jack Dacre and the valuable plans of the secret mine were riding was hurled against the rock as if a giant arm had impelled it to destruction.



Jack felt himself hurled headlong into the water. For a minute his fingers clutched desperately at the rock.

Cras-h-h-h-h!

The bow of the canoe crumpled under the impact as if it had been made of paper. Jack felt himself hurled headlong into the water. For a minute his fingers clutched desperately at the rock, but on its wet sides his digits could find no grip, and the next instant the water swept him from his hold and hurried him on down the stream.

Buffeted, breathless, and half drowned, the boy still kept his wits about him, and whenever he could, drew in a breath. It was impossible to swim in the hurrying rapids. All he could do was to avoid being dashed to pieces against one of the ragged rocks.

All at once, and just as he felt he could not hold out much longer, the boy was whirled by the waters into an eddy. In this spot the stream formed an oily, swirling, back current. With deep and comparatively smooth water under him, he struck out with his remaining strength, and a few seconds later half a dozen strong arms pulled him to the shore.

"That was a narrow shave you had there, youngster," said one of the men, as Jack spat the water from his mouth, and tried to wring out his dripping clothes.

"'Bout as close as anything I ever seed," rejoined another. "You must have been crazy ter try to shoot the Bunch of Grapes in that egg-shell."

He pointed to the fragments of the canoe which were now being whirled around in the same pool into which the current had, fortunately for himself, wafted the boy.

"I guess I was," Jack agreed, with a smile. "The fact is, I was thinking, and before I knew it I was in the trap."

"That shows how dangerous it is to think," remarked one of the group.

"Wall, all's well as ends well, as the almanac sez," remarked another of the men; "and now where might you be bound for?"

"Why, for Wissimantic Junction," replied the boy. "Am I near it?"

A burst of laughter from the men followed.

"Why, this is Wissimantic," exclaimed the first speaker, pointing to a cluster of neat frame houses behind the pine-clad bluff, which marked the termination of the rapids. "You couldn't have landed in it neater if you'd done it a-purpose. But yo're pretty wet, youngster, and a cup of hot coffee and some interior finish would do you as much good as anything else."

"I believe you're right," laughed Jack, feeling to make sure the precious papers were safe. How glad he was that they had been wrapped in waterproof coverings. "Is there a hotel in town where I can stay to-night and get my clothes dried?"

"Ho-tel," laughed the natives. "Ain't bin nothing like that here since Heck was a pup."

"Tell yer what, Sam," said the man who had first spoken, addressing a kindly-faced man who wore woodsman's clothes, "you kin put ther boy up an' feed him till mornin', I guess?"

"I sure kin," was the hearty rejoinder; "come on, young feller. You want ter git them clothes off, or you'll be gettin' a touch of chills an' fever."

Jack readily accepted the hearty invitation to

the woodsman's home, and was soon being shown to a neat bedroom with snowy muslin curtains and an equally snowy bed, by Sam's wife, who was as kind, and disposed to be hospitable, as Sam himself.

"Here," she said, as she showed the boy into the room. "There's some of Sam's clothes in that closet thar. I reckon you kin put 'em on till your own git dry."

Jack thanked her and soon had invested himself in Sam's garments. He was a tall lad for his age, and the clothes did not fit him badly, so when he appeared in the parlor a few minutes later—the room having been opened in his honor—he was pronounced "the dead spit of a woodsman."

Indeed, few of his friends would have recognized the boy, especially when he donned the rough cap that formed the headpiece of Sam's second best wardrobe.

After a hearty supper the boy slept like a top that night—and you may be sure the papers reposed beneath his pillow. His clothes had been

placed in front of the fire to dry during the night, but as ill-luck would have it, the green wood of which the blaze was formed, went "on strike" in the night, and refused to burn. At dawn, therefore, the boy's clothes were almost as wet as they had been the night before, and to put them on was out of the question.

"You'll hev ter borrer Sam's, I reckon," laughed Sam's wife. "My, but you'll cut an odd figger in ther city."

Jack felt too grateful to his hosts to dispute the question, and when, after a hasty breakfast, Sam announced they had better be getting to the depot, it was in his queer woodsman's garb that the Bungalow Boy set forth. He had tried to pay Sam and his wife for their hospitality, but they had indignantly refused a penny. So, promising to return the borrowed clothes at the first opportunity, Jack set forth for the depot looking as unlike himself as could be imagined.

He had not long to wait before the train rolled in. It was fairly well filled, and Jack took a seat in the smoking-car. As he did so, a man

who sat across the aisle from him gave a perceptible start, and scanned the lad's face closely. Jack, intent on looking at the scenery as it flitted by did not notice the attention he excited, nor did he observe that a smile of satisfaction curled the other's lips, as he gazed at the unconscious lad.

"One of the Bungalow Boys," the other muttered to himself, "and in disguise, too. Well, this is luck. I'll just keep an eye on him; it may pay me to."

The fellow who made this resolve was Bill Trimmers, the man whom the captive Tom had overheard Trulliber say was on his way to Bangor on an important errand.

Trimmers had caught the train at Norton's Cross Roads, and when the Bungalow Boy, whom he supposed was in the valley, had boarded the train at the junction, he could scarcely believe his eyes. A second look, however, satisfied him of the boy's identity. The fact, too, that as the train rolled on Jack Dacre drew from his pocket a carefully wrapped packet, as if to make certain

it was safe, convinced Trimmers that he had fallen in with a quarry worth trailing.

"If he doesn't recognize me, and there's not much chance of that, I'll kill two birds with one stone in Bangor," muttered Trimmers, with inward satisfaction. "For if that lad hasn't got something of interest to Trulliber in that package, I'm a double-dyed and magnified blue-jay."

CHAPTER XX

DANGER DRAWS NEAR

When the train pulled into Bangor some hours later, Jack Dacre, who we know was without baggage, owing to the accident to the canoe, lost no time in making his way to the Penobscot House, where he engaged a room. The boy almost smiled to himself as he noted the supercilious look of the clerk who registered him, and realized that it was on account of the rough clothes he wore that he was treated with such scant courtesy.

“Funny old world, this,” thought Jack. “Here I am in rough clothes, and I am treated accordingly, yet I am the same Jack Dacre, who not so long ago, registered here with the professor and the others, and was treated with every con-

sideration. Funny what a difference clothes make."

Which is what a great many other boys, and men, too, have thought, before the observation was forced upon Jack Dacre. The lad was so preoccupied with his own thoughts, that he did not notice that his traveling companion stepped up to the desk a few seconds after he had registered, and also secured a room.

Bill Trimmers, in his well-cut clothes and with his debonair, easy manner, received all the attention poor Jack had lacked, and, escorted by a grinning bellboy expectant of a fat tip, he stepped into the same elevator as the lad. Both got out on the same floor, which fact Trimmers noted with some satisfaction. It also transpired that they had adjoining rooms.

"Well, this is what I call 'too easy,' " chuckled Trimmers, as the door closed on him, and he noticed that there was a connecting door between the two rooms. Although the connecting door was locked, it was easy for Trimmers, who was tall, to mount on a chair, and through the

transom above it observe all that was going forward in his neighbor's room.

"Well," thought Jack, as he sat down on the edge of the bed and his odd image met his gaze in the mirror, "'what a change is here, my countrymen.' Oh, well, so much the better. I'm on an errand on which the fewer folks that recognize me the better pleased I'll be."

He shoved his hand down in his pocket and produced the papers.

"Now to see if they escaped all damage by water," he thought, and in a few seconds undid the wrappings. The papers were unharmed by their wetting, and Jack spread them out on the bed while he scanned them.

Trimmers' face as he peered through the transom at this point was a study.

"Phew!" he gasped, "plans, and, by the looks of it, some sort of a will. Say, this is a turn of luck, and no mistake."

Shortly after, Jack set out to find Mr. Pennington's office, which he located in a handsome block on the main street of Bangor. He was

doomed to a disappointment, however. Inquiry elicited the fact that Mr. Watson, Mr. Pennington's law partner, had been called to a neighboring town on an important case, and would not be back till evening. Jack, concealing his chagrin as best he could, thanked the stenographer and made his way from the office. As he opened the door leading to the corridor he almost collided with our friend Mr. Trimmers, who, it appeared, had urgent business inside with Mr. Watson. It scarcely needed the stenographer's repetition of the information that Mr. Watson was out of town, to apprise Mr. Trimmers of that fact, he having already heard it by what he would have termed the "keyhole route."

"Hum, Watson and Pennington were old man Dacre's lawyers," mused Mr. Trimmers. "Something's up. I've got to get those papers, though, before it'll be plain sailing."

Jack spent the rest of the day in roaming about the town and seeing what sights Bangor had to offer. He was returning to his hotel in the early

evening when he was suddenly greeted with a loud cry of:

"Whoop—here he is!"

"Glooming along like the missing heir in a dime novel!" exclaimed another voice. The next minute Jack turned to find himself confronting the Beetle and the Living Skeleton.

"Why, whatever are you doing here?" gasped Jack.

"We might as well ask you what *you* are doing here, all dressed up like a backwoodsman," grinned the Beetle. "Is that the fashionable attire in this part of the world? All it needs is a green veil to make it real classy."

"And as for asking us what we are doing here, that's a good one," boomed the Living Skeleton, in his deep bass tones. "Didn't you fellows extend us a pressing—nay, an urgent invitation—to come and call whenever we felt like it."

"Oh, by George! that's so. I beg your pardon," laughed Jack, glad all through to see his old chums. "So many things have been happening that I'd clean forgotten about it."

"Well, we hadn't. We're on our way up there now. We've come loaded for bear, too. The Beetle's got a rifle guaranteed to kill an elephant at two miles, and a spriker-sproker at three."

"I don't know what a spriker-sproker is, but we've got no elephants up there for you," laughed Jack. "Awfully glad to have you, though."

The two boys, it appeared, had got in on the afternoon boat.

"We got tired of tennis and teas, and teas and tennis," explained the Beetle, "so we struck out for the wilds. But you still haven't explained what you are doing mingling with the gay life of the Maine metropolis, when you ought to be doing the Roosevelt act on the backwoods ranch."

By this time they had reached the Penobscot House, and Jack drew the two boys inside. Seated on chairs in the rotunda, he gave them a full account so far as he knew it of the events that had occurred since their arrival in Maine. As we know, he was not aware of Tom's peril, or the situation of Sandy and the professor.

"Whoop!" exclaimed the Beetle, as Jack con-

cluded. "Well, for modest shrinking violets, I must say that you've been coming it strong in the adventure line. And that terrible Turk, Sandy Rob Roy McGregor MacIntosh McTavish, I suppose he's roaming his native heath like a young spring bok."

"Sandy's been singularly repressed since he's been up there," laughed Jack.

"Having no oatmeal has gone to his head," suggested the Beetle.

"By the way," exclaimed the Beetle suddenly, "this Mr. Watson you spoke of is a sort of an uncle of mine, I guess. Some of his folks married my mother's, which makes a relationship, you see. Now, we'll get him on the 'phone this eve, and maybe when he learns it is his distinguished relative talking he'll give us an interview out of office hours. You want to move quick in this thing, for this Trolley-car or Trubble-fer, or whatever his name is, seems to be a swift-thinking sort of an individual."

Mr. Watson, who was reached by 'phone soon after, received the boys at his house that evening

and discussed the situation with Jack and his chums.

"There is no necessity for you to worry about your title to the mine," he said. "It is as about your title to the mine," he said. "It is as solid as the Bank of England. As to what you say about this man Trulliber, however, I am of a different opinion. He seems to be a desperate character. However, come and see me in the morning, and I will have decided on a plan of action."

With this the boys had to be satisfied.

Little dreaming what was at that moment occurring to those in whom he was most interested, Jack and his chums journeyed back to the hotel. They soon retired to bed, the other two having engaged rooms at the same hotel.

Fortunately for Jack as things fell out he was a light sleeper, or he might have suffered a serious loss. As it was, he awakened soon after midnight, with a vague feeling that something was wrong. Suddenly he became aware of a catlike tread in the room, and in the dim light, that shone

from the hall, he saw a dark figure moving about. He felt under the pillow where he had placed the papers—they were gone!

As he sat upright in bed the intruder made a rush for him, but Jack was too quick. He seized the fellow as he came on and grappled with him.

“Let—let me go!” choked the man, striving to throw the boy’s clasp from his throat.

Jack’s reply was a loud shout for help, for he felt he could not hold the other much longer. Even as they struggled, however, something familiar about the man’s face struck him. Almost simultaneously he realized where he had seen him before.

It was the man whom we know as Bill Trimmers, but whom Jack recalled as the man who had tendered the false bill on the train to the professor, and whom the latter had seen enter the mine.

“Help! Help!” shouted the boy.

“Let me go, or I’ll kill you!” exclaimed the man in a low, tense voice.

He had succeeded in loosening Jack’s clasp on his throat, and reached back as if to draw some

weapon. Jack's reply was to seize the man again, but at the same instant the fellow raised a long knife and made a desperate lunge at his opponent. Jack fell back, just missing the downward stroke of the blade, and the man dashed off down the hall.

"Stop, thief! Stop, thief!" shouted the boy, sprinting after him, clad only in the pajamas he had borrowed from the Beetle. The other guests of the hotel, including Jack's two chums, were roused by the cries.

Out of their rooms they came pouring, clad only in the scantiest of garments. The would-be thief, however, was fully dressed, and from the fact that he cast away a small grip as he ran, seemed to have been prepared to leave the hotel as soon as he accomplished his purpose of robbery.

With a bound, Jack was on the thief's neck as the man reached the head of the stairway, and with a football tackle brought him down.

Bumpety, bumpety, bump!

Down the stairs they rolled.

"Help! Murder! Fire!" screamed a fat woman, opening her door.

"It's Jack! He's caught a crook robbing him!" shouted the Beetle, as he and the Skeleton raced ahead of the other excited guests. Jack's room was on the first floor, and so when he and the robber fell together down the stairway they rolled right out into the centre of the office before they stopped revolving.

Jack's head struck the tiled flooring with a terrific bump as they landed, and for a second he lay half stunned, while the excited night clerk, who had been talking to a stockily built man with a gray mustache, sprang forward. Down the stairs poured the guests in a fantastic parade.

Seeing that his enemy was disabled, Bill Trimmers leaped to his feet and started to race for the door. He saw freedom in front of him.

Suddenly a sharp voice brought him to an abrupt halt.

"Stop where you are, Bill Trimmers!"

The gray-mustached man stood in the centre of the hotel office, aiming a revolver with an un-

wavering hand at the fleeing Bill Trimmers, who wisely stopped dead at the words of command.

There was a ring in the gray-mustached man's voice that meant business.

"Oh, don't shoot!" screamed a hysterical woman, as the gray-mustached man approached Bill Trimmers, who had suddenly turned white, and whose knees were knocking together.

"Well, Bill, I've got you at last," said the gray-mustached man, as he produced a pair of handcuffs. "Just slip on these bracelets, and don't make a fuss."

Bill Trimmers looked as if he would have liked to make a dash for freedom, but the sight of the revolver quelled him.

"What's that you've got in your hand?" demanded the gray-mustached man, as Bill Trimmers hurriedly tried to conceal something.

"I think that's my property," said Jack, coming up. He had soon recovered from the blow on the head.

"How can you prove it?" snapped the other,

who had gained possession of the paper and opened it.

"It is a description and plan of a supposed lead mine on the Sawmill Creek on Mr. Dacre's property," rejoined the boy.

The other gazed at the papers.

"Right you are, my boy. Lucky to get them back again. This man is as clever a thief and all-around crook as there is in this country."

Just then a bellboy hurried up with the grip the fleeing man had dropped.

"Never mind it, inspector," begged Trimmers. "I'll confess it's full of the queer."

And so it proved. The bag was filled almost with bad bills and coins of all denominations, which Trimmers had brought to the city to circulate.

At this point two local policemen appeared, and the "inspector," as Trimmers had called him, turned the man over to them.

"So you come from Sawmill Creek," he exclaimed, turning to Jack. "Well, that's queer. I was on my way up there. We have long sus-

pected that a gang of counterfeiters was at work there. In fact, we've an agent on the watch there now; but this is the first we ever heard of a mine. Would you mind telling me all you know about this man and his gang?"

So, seated on a lounge in the hotel lobby, with a dressing gown thrown round his shoulders, Jack told of the events that had transpired in the immediate past, not forgetting the professor's adventure.

At the conclusion of his narrative, the other, who had listened with deep attention, assumed a grave look.

"In my opinion," he said slowly, after a few minutes of deep thought, "we had better get up to Sawmill Creek as quick as we possibly can. Trulliber and his gang are among the most desperate men in the country, and your friends may be in serious trouble by this time."

CHAPTER XXI

A DROP INTO SPACE

On hearing the blacksmith's voice, Tom Dacre looked up with a flash of indignation in his gaze. He felt angered to think that the man who owed him a debt of gratitude should have leagued himself with his persecutors. The smith's first words, however, undeceived him of his idea that the man's visit was a hostile one.

"I've no time to talk," whispered Ingalls; "what I am about to do will show you better than words what my intentions are. I tried to warn you, though—you remember those notes?"

"You wrote them?" cried Jack.

"Yes, I wanted to warn you the valley was unsafe for you. And it was I that stood on the rock and scared the negro so, the night you lost the professor."

So saying, he produced a keen knife and rapidly slashed Tom Dacre's bonds. Except for the guards in the outer room, the Bungalow Boy was free.

"There's a door at the end of this shed," said the smith. "When all is quiet, and the lights out inside, just slip over and open it, and then get away as fast as you can. At present the men do not mean to harm you, but there is no saying when their minds may change."

A sudden stir in the other room prevented him saying more, but he stretched out his hand to the boy, who seized it in a grateful grip. The next moment he was gone.

All this occurred while Sandy and the professor were lamenting Tom's supposed death in the pool, and while Sam Hartley was hastening toward them. His original intention had been to carry the news to the bungalow, but the sound of the voices of the searchers halted him, with the results which we have already learned.

The minute that Tom saw the lights go out, which was not before Nate Trulliber had given

a final inspection of the shed, the boy hastened to crawl out of his blankets and make his way to the door the smith had indicated.

Before he left, however, he arranged the blankets so as to look as if he were sleeping in them, and this was what had fooled Sam Hartley into believing Tom still lay within them. At almost the same moment that the latter put his foot on the ladder outside the shed, therefore, Tom Dacre was fumbling with the fastenings of the door, and in a few seconds stood out under the starlight.

The boy was utterly bewildered as he found himself free and in the open air. He had been unconscious during the trip to the Trullibers' dwellings, and consequently had no idea whether he was within a mile or twenty miles of the bungalow.

Hurriedly he gazed about, but the dense and silent woods that stood close up to the dwellings told him nothing of his whereabouts, and he knew that his safety depended on getting away quickly. At any moment the Trullibers or one of the gang

might wake and discover his absence. With these thoughts in his mind, the boy slipped round the corner of the shed, and was about to vanish into a dense patch of woods and undergrowth beyond the house, when he encountered something that made his heart stand still.

Slipping around the corner of the building, so as to take full advantage of its shadow, he had come face to face with a powerfully built, savage-looking bulldog.

For a breathing space, the boy gazed at the dog, and the dog gazed at the boy. Neither made a move.

All at once the animal uttered a low growl, full of ferocious intent, and baring its fangs savagely, made for the boy. But at the first symptom of trouble, Tom had bent swiftly down and picked up a large stone.

As the dog came for him he dropped the rock, which struck the creature fair and square between the eyes. It sank to the ground instantly, but as it succumbed uttered a yelp.

At the same instant a door just above the crum-

pled creature flew open, and the figure of young Trulliber looked out. He held a shotgun in his hands.

"Jock, Jock, what's the matter?" Tom heard the lad call.

Receiving no reply, he came down the flight of rough steps which led to the door, and as he reached the ground, almost stumbled over the dog's body.

"Dead!" he gasped, looking up, and as he did so his eyes encountered Tom Dacre, who was crouching far back in the shadow.

At first Jeff Trulliber paled as if he had seen a ghost, but the next instant he raised the shotgun he carried to his shoulder.

"You—you killed my dog!" he gasped. "I'll finish you!"

Tom's mind had been made up in a flash. As Jeff Trulliber raised the gun and leveled it, he crouched low in a football tackle, and rushing full at the other, caught him between the legs, just as his finger pressed the trigger.

"Bang!" went the gun, its charge shooting harmlessly into the air.

Its echoes—which caused such consternation to the disappointed rescuer, Sandy and the professor—had hardly died out before Tom had plunged into the obscurity of the woodland. Bent low, he ran at top speed in and out among the dense growth.

Every now and then he stopped and listened intently.

But the sounds of the pursuit, loud at first, soon died out behind him, and the boy breathed more freely.

"Good thing I nailed that dog," he thought to himself; "if I hadn't, they would have set him on my track and have caught me, in all probability."

He looked about him. The moon was now clear of the walls of the narrow valley and silvering the pine tops.

"Where on earth am I?" mused Tom.

He felt for his compass, but it was not in his pocket. In his hurried flight he must have lost it.

"Well, it looks as if I'm out of the frying pan into the fire with a vengeance!" he muttered. "Only thing to do is to press forward, I suppose. If I can get to a cliff top, I can see where I am when daylight comes."

For the rest of the night the boy pushed on. As he traveled he felt deeply thankful that he had eaten such a hearty meal while he lay a prisoner at the Trullibers'. Had he not done so, it is doubtful if he would have had the strength necessary for the long siege of protracted effort.

The first glimmerings of dawn found Tom at the summit of one of the hills overlooking the valley, but to his intense disappointment a heavy mist veiled the lowlands, preventing him from ascertaining his whereabouts. He thought, though, he had been traveling in a northeasterly direction.

"As I've been climbing up-hill most of the night, I guess I'm pretty high up," mused the boy. "I wish this mist would clear off, so that I could get my bearings."

But had Tom known it, a perverse fate had

so willed it that the fog was to remain—as it sometimes does in mountainous regions in summer—shrouding the valley for the greater part of the day.

The boy, however, made his way in what he judged was a southwesterly course along the cliff top, thinking that in that direction must lie the bungalow, if, indeed, he was anywhere near it, a fact of which he was by no means certain.

By noon, according to his estimate—for young Jeff Trulliber already possessed the watch he had set his covetous eyes on when first he saw it, and Tom now had no timepiece—the boy had traveled several miles. As a matter of fact, he had not progressed anything like that distance. But in a fog, as all wilderness travelers know, all sense of proportion and direction is soon lost.

“Oh, for a ham sandwich or anything at all to eat!” sighed the boy. “Will this pesky mist never lift?”

He ventured close to the edge of the cliff, pushing his way through the undergrowth, and looked over. Below him lay billows of dense white

mist. It might be twenty feet to the floor of the valley, and it might be a mile. He had no way of telling.

As he faced about, Tom heard a loud crackling in the bushes behind him.

A sudden hope crossed his mind that it might betoken the coming of a human being and friend. He was destined to be disappointed, however, for the next minute he realized that the noise made by the oncoming rustler was far too loud and cumbersome for a man.

"What can it be?" thought Tom, really alarmed. "Maybe a bear, and I'm unarmed!"

As this thought struck him it also occurred to the boy that it might be a good idea to get away from the edge of the cliff. His position was such that he was hemmed in on either side by brush, and his only way of retreat was directly into the path of the oncoming crashing and rustling. Louder grew the noise and louder, as whatever was causing it drew nearer. The boy could now hear, too, a hoarse:

"Woof! woof!" as the creature, whatever it was, pushed its way along.

"I'm caught in a trap!" thought Tom, seeking for some means of escape.

Suddenly the bushes ahead of him parted, and the boy was face to face with a creature which, if he had seen it in any other situation, would have caused a feeling of intense admiration to course through him. As it was, however, he experienced by no means any such emotion.

With a cliff behind him and impenetrable brush on each side of him, the Bungalow Boy was face to face with a huge moose.

The monarch of the Maine forest gazed at the boy for a second out of its large, reddish eyes, in which there gleamed a flash of fierce hostility.

Suddenly the great animal lowered his antlered head, and with an angry "Wo-o-o-f!" rushed straight at the boy.

A thousand thoughts shot through Tom's brain in a mad dance. The next instant, without knowing it, he had stepped back to the cliff brink.

He uttered a loud cry, as he felt the ground give

beneath his feet, and heard confusedly a frightened roar from the charging moose.

The next instant Tom Dacre and the animal that had attacked him toppled over the edge of the cliff in a rattling shower of stones and dust.

Down, down they shot till the mist swallowed them.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN A LIVING TOMB

Downward dashed the boy, clutching as he fell at small shrubs and bushes which grew in the interstices of the cliffs. But one after another they gave way in his grip. Luckily, the cliff at this point was only perpendicular for a short distance, although the mist had screened its lower portions from the boy's gaze. The sheer rock toward its base grew scaly, and was composed of loose, broken fragments.

All at once Tom found himself projected by the force of his fall into a small tree, and this time his grip held. He felt dizzy and faint, though, as he cowered in the branches, he knew not how high above level ground.

To his ears was distinctly borne the clashing and rattling of loose stones and the snapping of

small trees as the body of the moose bumped on down the steep slope.

In a few moments all sounds ceased.

"I guess that's the last of that moose," mused Tom; "and it would have been the last of me, too, if it hadn't been for this friendly tree," he added.

Peering from his leafy retreat, the boy saw, a few feet from him, a sort of submerged ledge. As it at least afforded a secure foothold, the boy let go of the tree and slid down to it. To his astonishment, the dust and fine stones which covered the narrow pathway were worn as if with footprints.

"Some one has used this as a path," exclaimed Tom. "Maybe by following it I can come to some human habitation."

With this idea in mind, he followed the path up, but to his disappointment, instead of leading anywhere definite, the trail ended abruptly in front of what seemed to be a cave. Above the entrance a big rock lay poised in the cliff side.

Our readers will have little difficulty in recognizing Sam Hartley's retreat.

Bearing in mind his adventure with the moose, and not wanting another experience of the same character, the lad peered cautiously into the interior of this hole in the rock before he attempted to penetrate it. You may judge of his astonishment when he saw, instead of the bare rock walls and floor he had expected, that the cave seemed to be a human habitation. A pile of blankets lay in one corner of it, and some cooking utensils hung against the walls.

"Well, as there seems to be nobody at home," thought Tom, "I may as well go in and see what sort of a place this is."

Accordingly, he entered and found himself in what we know to be the dwelling of the mysterious stranger who had been able to do the boys so many services, and who at that very minute was with the professor and Sandy, scouring the valley for some trace of the lad.

"As nobody's in and I'm so hungry," thought

Tom, "I don't suppose they'll grudge me a mouthful to eat."

The idea of being at least in a human dwelling place, rough though it was, had raised his spirits wonderfully. A carcass of a rabbit, ready skinned and cleaned, hung in a corner of the cave, as if inviting him to eat.

"You won't have to invite me a second time," said Tom, addressing the rabbit.

Soon he had kindled a fire with the supply of wood he found, and which Sam Hartley had collected, and dissecting the rabbit with a cooking knife he discovered, shortly had a satisfactory meal sizzling in the frying pan. Topped off with some pilot bread, and with a chunk of Sam Hartley's never-failing chocolate—found in a corner—for dessert, Tom felt a new man—or rather boy—after he had finished.

It may be judged by this that he had made a pretty thorough search of the cave, as, indeed, he had. Among other things, he had come across some slips of paper covered with writing.

"Never do to read private papers," thought

Tom, as he replaced them where he had disturbed them in his hunt for something to eat; but his eye could not help catching a few repetitions of the words "Dacre" and "Trullibers."

"Well, whoever lived here was interested in us, apparently," thought Tom, as, placing everything as he had found it, he prepared to leave the cave. First, however, he scribbled: "Thanks! Will do the same for you some day. Tom Dacre." on a piece of paper, and weighting it with a rock, left it where the occupant of the cave, whoever he might be, would be sure to see it.

This done, he started back down the path which by this time he had become convinced must lead to the valley.

A few paces from the cave, however, he halted abruptly. Footsteps were coming toward him, and presently he heard voices. His recognition of their tones did not add to his peace of mind. In fact, the boy was destined once more that day to receive a rude shock.

An instant's listening had satisfied him that

the men approaching through the mist were Trulliber and Dan Dark. A shriller voice seemed to be that of the younger Trulliber.

Cool-headed as he was, Tom was for an instant panic-stricken. His first impulse was to jump from the cliff and trust to luck to save his bones somehow. His next was to retreat to the cave. He followed his second thought, and ran at top speed back up the trail. Once in the cave, he crouched in its blackest corner, far back in a sort of recess under the rocks. The space was not more than sufficient to hide his body, but he felt that so long as the Trullibers did not make a thorough search he was safe from discovery.

As he had surmised, the visit of the Trullibers portended mischief.

The Trullibers, however, seemed to use caution in approaching the cave.

"Look out Hartley ain't in there. He'd plug you soon as winking!" warned Dan Dark.

"Hum! that's what I've bin thinking," rejoined Trulliber's voice. "Jeff, my boy, you go ahead."

"And draw his fire if he's there? Not much, pop!" was the dutiful son's response. "You go."

Finally, after some more palaver, the elder Trulliber tramped heavily into the cave. He had a rifle on his arm, and from the way he carried it he evidently had expected to use it.

"Here's luck!" he exclaimed. "Come on, Dan; come on, Jeff, the sneaking spy is out."

"Say, father, I guess I was pretty smart to find his hiding place," chuckled young Jeff.

"That's right, my boy," admiringly answered his father. "Ain't no boys smarter than you, Jeff, and I'll see that you get your reward for it."

"I didn't just get the right of how you stumbled on it. How was it, Jeff?" inquired Dan Dark, while the elder Trulliber poked about the cave.

"Why, as I told you on the day I tried to do for those Dacres by rolling a boulder on 'em, I heard some one shout to them. I hid behind a bush and watched and soon saw it was Sam Hartley. That set me to thinking, and then I ran inter some good luck. I was rabbit hunting up on the

cliff yesterday, when I see this Sam Hartley coming up the trail. Ah, ha, thinks I, there's your hiding place, and I marked the trail leading to it by 'blazing' that big sugar pine in the valley."

"Well, it's a lucky thing for us that we found out in time that Sam Hartley was in the valley," snorted Dan, "fer of all the stick-to-it varmint ter go after you, he is the worst! He's the feller that arrested Bill Trimmers, back in '96, but Bill was too slippery for 'em, and escaped from prison. He'd give a good deal to be able to get his hands on Sam Hartley, I reckon."

"I can't find anything here that we want," grumbled the elder Trulliber, after a prolonged search that had several times brought him too close to Tom's hiding place for the lad to breathe easily. "I guess we'd better be getting back and making preparations for getting out. Now that we know that Sam Hartley's here, this valley's too warm for my health."

"Right you are," agreed Dan; "but I'd like to do something to hurt him first. I tell you, let's pile all this stuff up and set it on fire."

Tom's heart gave a bound. If they kindled a fire of such proportions in the small cave, he would stand a good chance of being suffocated unless he crawled out of his hiding place and gave himself up.

Luckily, however, Dan's suggestion was vetoed by Nate Trulliber.

"Take too much time," he growled, "and we've work to do up at the mine. We must destroy all that kit up there before we go. Any one's likely to stumble on it, and it would be so much evidence against us."

"I tell you what, father," shrilled young Jeff suddenly, "let's roll that big boulder, up there, down in front of the cave entrance. That'll astonish Mister Hartley, and show him that he hasn't got everything his way."

"That's a good idea," agreed his father, and Dan Dark burst into a hearty chuckle.

"What a youngster you are to think of lively tricks," he exclaimed admiringly.

Now, this conversation, including young Jeff's suggestion, took place in front of the cave, to

which place the invaders had by this time removed, so that Tom did not hear it. Had he done so, there would have been considerable debate in his mind as to whether it would be best to come out of his hiding place or remain where he was.

This choice was not to be given him, however. As things were, he felt nothing but gratitude as the Trullibers left the cave. He made up his mind to emerge as soon as the coast was clear, and then make his way down the trail.

"I wonder what on earth they are doing?" he thought, as he heard a great rumbling and heaving in front of the cave. "Sounds as if they were digging a hole."

It was the moving of the great rock that Tom heard. Soon all became silent. It was evident that the Trullibers and Dan Dark had gone.

Tom emerged from his hole, but cautiously, however. He knew that he was dealing with tricky enemies. How tricky, however, he did not imagine.

"Hullo! the cave's dark!" was his first thought.

"What can have happened? Can it be night so soon?"

He stumbled forward to where he knew the cave entrance was, feeling his way along the walls. In the pitchy darkness the place felt damp and uncanny.

Stretching out his hands in front of him, the boy felt rock. On each side of him, too, were solid walls.

Could he have mistaken the entrance?

Panic-stricken, he stumbled toward the rear of the cave, then back again. For a second he thought he must have been suddenly stricken blind.

Suddenly the full extent of his calamity burst upon him.

He had been immured, either by accident or design, in a living grave. All about him were walls of solid rock which, without tools or weapons, he could not hope to penetrate.

Who shall blame the boy if, as he realized the extent of his calamity, he cast himself to the floor of the cave and sobbed despairingly?

CHAPTER XXIII

WHAT THE STORM DID

Tom's fit of despair did not last long. He was not the sort of a boy who gives up all hope easily. By dint of lighting matches and feeling about, he stumbled across the candle end Sam Hartley had been accustomed to use when he entered the cave, and ignited it. With its bright rays illuminating the place, he began at once an investigation to determine the exact nature of the barrier that had been rolled between himself and the outside world.

Even a casual inspection showed him that the boulder was of immense size, and that it would have been impossible for even the three persons who had placed it at the cave mouth to have manipulated it, had it not been for the fact that it

was almost balanced on the cliff side just above the cave mouth.

Although he knew it was scarcely worth while, the boy pushed and shoved at the obstruction till his hands were raw and his muscles tired and limp. Of course, he could not budge it the hundredth part of an inch.

The discovery that he was so utterly a prisoner came near unnerving the boy once more, but he braced up, and preserving a stiff upper lip, surveyed the cave in the hope of finding something that he could utilize to displace the huge rock. His scrutiny was in vain, however. Beyond the few simple cooking utensils, the cave was bare of anything he could use as a means of escape.

How improbable it was that his friends would come to his aid, Tom did not dare to think. The only hope he had was that the real dweller of the cave might visit it, and that he could make his terrible situation known. In this hope, Tom sat down stolidly to await the coming about of something that he realized was practically an impossibility.

Despite the nature of his predicament as he sat on the blankets in the rear of the cave, a sense of drowsiness soon began to assert itself. He had passed a sleepless night, and the exertions and excitement he had passed through since his escape from the 'Trullibers' shed rendered him so fatigued that he could hardly keep his eyes open. More than once he nodded and almost dozed off.

"This won't do," thought Tom; "the chap who lives here may show up before long, and if I'm asleep I may miss that chance of getting away."

Alas! for Tom's stout resolution. Like many another man and boy who has determined to remain awake, he momentarily found the task growing harder and harder. He had blown out the candle, to husband his resources, for if the worst came to the worst, he at least wanted to have the means of light at hand, so that he could write a last message to his friends outside.

Gradually, so gradually that even his will was not proof against it, his overwhelming drowsiness got the best of the boy, and he sank into a sound slumber.

He awoke with a start. And as his senses became alert he was aware of an unusual sound.

It was a heavy, rumbling noise.

Could it be possible that his predicament had been discovered and that some one outside was attempting to remove the stone?

For a brief second or two, hope filled the boy's heart and then flickered out again.

The rumbling ceased, only to set in again with renewed volume. So heavy was the sound that the solid cliff seemed to vibrate.

"Thunder!" breathed the boy.

Almost at the same moment the cave began to be anything but a comfortable place. A tiny stream of water, doubtless pouring in through the invisible chimney which carried off the smoke of Sam Hartley's cooking fire, oozed across the floor. Rapidly it grew in volume, till Tom was compelled to move to a higher part of the cave. He struck his light, and saw that most of the cave bottom was covered by water. Dammed up by the closed door of the cave, the water began

to rise higher and higher, till fully an inch of it covered the cavern floor.

Although Tom was now standing pressed against the wall of the cave, the flood was soon lapping his shoe soles. Gradually it crept up, till in a wonderfully short time it had reached his ankles.

"It must be raining in torrents outside," thought Tom, and with this thought came another. After the long dry summer the water courses would carry down an immense volume of water to feed the lake. If it should rise, and none thought to open the water gate leading to the flume, it was likely that the entire plot of ground on which the bungalow stood would be flooded.

"Queer that I should be worrying about that, when I don't even know if I'll ever see it again," thought Tom whimsically.

Outside the boy's natural prison the thunder still boomed and crashed, and he could almost smell the sulphurous fumes of the lightning that he knew must be zipping in ragged streaks across the sky.

Thus passed an hour. By which time the presence of the water in the cave was beginning to be a serious menace. It had reached the boy's knees, and was still rising, dammed up by the rock at the cave entrance.

If nothing happened, the flood must in time reach higher and higher, till—Tom did not complete the thought even to himself. Besides, he did not believe that the rain could continue much longer. At the rate at which the cave was filling, the heavens must be emptying themselves of the long accumulations of the dry months, thought the boy, and the volume of the downpour must be terrific.

Higher and higher rose the water, however, as if to controvert Tom's thought. It reached his belt, then by imperceptible degrees rose above that. As if fascinated, the lad riveted his eye on its level as it reached the lower button of his short coat, submerged that and crawled on up to the second, and then almost reached his chest.

Suddenly a disaster which was about as bad as could have befallen the boy occurred. In rais-

ing his candle to cast its beams upon the rising tide, he gave it a sudden swirl which almost extinguished it. In his desperate effort to coddle the flame, Tom's unnerved fingers fumbled with the precious bit of wax, and the next instant he was in pitchy blackness, while the candle he had dropped lay under three feet and a half of water.

His matches he had carelessly left lying on a lower shelf of rock and they had vanished long since.

"It's the end!" thought Tom, his head reeling under this new disaster. Somehow, standing in the dark there, with the water ever creeping higher, was far more disturbing than possessing the ability to watch its upward course.

But as Tom's lips formed his despairing words a strange thing happened.

The water began to fall. At first he could not be sure of it, but in a few seconds he had made certain that it had receded at least an inch. It was clear that it must have found an outlet, but where?

If only he had a light!

All at once, mingling with the roar of the elements outside, and the sound of the miniature cascade that was gushing into the cave by Sam Hartley's chimney, there came a different sound, a sound of rending and slipping. Tom felt the submerged rock floor beneath his feet quiver and vibrate as if an earthquake were shaking it.

Louder and louder grew the noise, till it drowned everything else in a deafening roar.

"It's an earthquake!" exclaimed the boy, expecting every minute to feel the walls of the cave crushing in on him.

But even as he spoke the nature of the disturbance became apparent. With a noise like the subsidence of a whole mountain, the cliff side in front of the cave had begun to slide downward.

Dried and baked by its long months of drought, the suddenly saturated ground had proved unequal to the strain placed upon it, and a slice of the cliff fully fifty feet wide had slid bodily into the valley below, and, as Tom realized a second later, the providential subsidence had carried with it the huge stone that blocked his escape.

As the monster boulder, with which the Trulibers had hoped to bar the cave entrance forever, rocked on its foundations and then went sliding off with the rest of its surroundings, the water in the cave rushed forth with a roar like the voice of a torrent. Tom, caught in an unguarded moment, was almost carried with it, but a quick grab at a projecting piece of rock saved him.

Ten minutes later the Bungalow Boy stood on the muddy floor of the cave, with the entrance open before him once more, revealing a view of storm-torn skies crossed and recrossed by jagged streaks of brilliant lightning. Of the mist, every trace had been swept away.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A GREAT SURPRISE

To a boy situated as Tom had been, however, the storm held few terrors. Pausing a moment only to recollect his thoughts, he emerged from the cave which had so nearly proved his tomb, out onto the rain-swept side of the cliff. A great jagged wound showed in its side, where the landslide had occurred; but fortunately for the boy, the débris had begun to back up not more than twenty feet below him. A gigantic pile of yellow earth, stones and great trees in a confused huddle, stretching up the cliff side from the floor of the valley, showed the havoc the landslide had wrought.

From the narrow ledge left at the cave door to the top of the great pile of accumulated trees and earth, the drop was almost a perpendicular one;

but Tom knew that if he was to escape he would have to chance it. Squatting on his hips, he laid hold for a minute of a projection of the rock, and then, with a murmured prayer, let go.

Down he shot, quicker than the fastest elevator, and landed head foremost in the branches of a fallen pine tree. Scratched, shaken and bruised, but safe and sound, the boy soon scrambled to his feet, and began the next part of his descent. His chief fear was that there would be a second landslide; but although frequent rumblings and roarings about him denoted that small subsidences of the suddenly saturated cliff side were occurring constantly, he reached the bottom of the precipice in safety.

Once away from the gigantic pile of wreckage which the landslide had piled up, the boy gazed about him. He was at the upper part of the valley, and the subsiding storm, which was rolling away to the north, had left a pearly twilight behind it in which the wet forest gleamed somberly.

“Great Cæsar’s ghost! to think that I was al-

most within call of home all the time!" exclaimed the boy, as his eye lit on a green roof among the wet trees at the lower end of the valley.

"There's the bungalow and the lake, and if it hadn't been for that mist this morning, I might have been there now. Well, there's only one thing to do, and that is to get a move on and make the best of my way there now, and get some dry clothes and hot grub, and then to get after those Trullibers. If we don't make things warm for them!"

Everywhere about the boy as he moved on down the valley were the traces of the storm. Here and there was a lightning-shattered tree, its bark ripped off and its smoldering branches lying in a heap at its foot. All about him, too, was the roar of dozens of suddenly awakened streams. The torrential downpour had filled every small watercourse in the valley.

"We'll have a flood by morning if we're not careful," thought the boy.

An odd sight Tom was as he made his way along among the fallen trees and waded through

boiling streams which the day before had been dried-up depressions in the ground. Plastered from head to foot with yellow mud, where he had crawled down the landslide, marked and bleeding from a score of small cuts and scratches, lame, wet and ragged, he resembled nothing so much as a storm-battered scarecrow. But his heart was still strong and hopeful, and with every foot of his homeward way he grew more cheerful.

"What a start I'll give them!" he thought, as he pushed along. "I'll just march right in on them and scare them half to death."

He had now struck into a regular trail, and a few minutes later stood at the side of the stream in which the redoubtable Jumbo had his lurking-place. But Sawmill Creek had lost all resemblance to the placid watercourse the Bungalow Boys knew. It was muddy-colored, and boiled between its banks like a fierce charger imprisoned by a chafing rein.

Tom had to beat about for some time before he found a place where he could cross with safety,

and only accomplished that feat by straddling a log which was immersed a foot deep in the roaring waters. He was almost swept from his place on the natural bridge half a dozen times as he wormed his way across, but at last he reached the other side in safety.

In half an hour more the walls of the bungalow came in sight. It was almost dark as the boy approached the structure, only a faint light remaining in the west, while to the north great black clouds, occasionally glaring vividly with a flash of lightning, were rolling away.

"Hullo!" shouted Tom at the top of his voice.
"Hullo!"

There was no answer.

"I guess they are all in at supper," he mused.
"Well, so much the better. I'll give them a bigger surprise than ever."

He walked boldly forward into what was the biggest surprise of his life, for as he thundered on the door with both fists, and called in a voice that woke the echoes of the cliff opposite:

"Hey, there! Open up to the prodigal son!"

the door opened, and the amazed Bungalow Boy stood face to face with Nate Trulliber!

For a moment Tom's first instinct was to **run**, but his next emotion was one of keener astonishment than before, for Nate Trulliber, instead of bursting out with his usual ferocious manner, seemed almost embarrassed. His face showed white under the growth of black beard that shielded him almost to the eyes, like a mask. He seemed scarcely able to speak.

"I'm wounded!" he gasped; and Tom then saw, for the first time, that it was all that the mighty Nate Trulliber could do to stand upright. He leaned back against the doorpost, breathing like a spent runner. His shirt above his heaving chest was crimsoned.

"Why, I—— What has happened?" began Tom, so astonished at the extraordinary turn of events that had placed the wounded Nate Trulliber in the bungalow that he could hardly speak.

"Come in," urged Trulliber. "No, you needn't be afraid. I cannot hurt you now, and I am not leading you into a trap."

He reeled as if about to fall, and the boy steadied him by grasping his arm.

"I don't know whether you're lying or not, Nate," he said, "but I'll take a chance and trust you.

"Get in that chair and tell me what has happened," he exclaimed, as they entered the living room. "First, though, I want to examine that wound."

As they appeared, a sort of mixture between a Comanche war yell and the yawp of a shaggy and overjoyed Newfoundland dog greeted them. It was Jasper who came bounding from the kitchen regions.

"Oh, bress de lawd, bress de lawd!" he shouted, embracing Tom till his black face was smeared with yellow mud. "Dis am de cumfolubbiest t'ing dat hab happen to old Jasper sence Massa Lincum set us free! Whar you come frum, Massa Tom, whar you come frum? What you lak ter eat? Don't talk to dat no-good trash dar. Bah!" exclaimed Jasper, dancing around Nate Trulliber contemptuously. "Ef ebry hair in his

whiskers dar was a life, ah done lak ter hab dem every one."

Better than anything else was Trulliber's helpless condition shown in the fact that he made no objection to Jasper's contemptuous demonstration, but sat back in the chair, breathing heavily, and from time to time pressing the torn fragment of his shirt to the wound in his chest.

"You'd better let me dress that," said Tom, touched in spite of himself by Trulliber's evident pain and distress.

He got the necessary appliance from the professor's medicine chest, and washed and then bandaged the man's injury, which, although only a flesh wound, was an ugly one, and evidently inflicted by a rifle shot. In the meantime, Jasper had cooked a hasty meal and brought it in.

"And now," said Tom, between hungry mouthfuls, "let's hear what has happened."

It was soon told. After rolling the stone in front of the cave's mouth—in which, so Trulliber swore, and Tom believed him, they had no idea a human being was concealed—the two men and

the boy made their way down the valley, with the intention of taking the trail to the mine. As they made their way downward, however, they had passed at some distance, and unobserved, the professor, Sandy MacTavish and Sam Hartley, who, as Tom guessed, must have been searching for him. This put a sudden idea into the desperadoes' minds. It would be a good opportunity for them to search the bungalow for any valuables or papers.

With this object in view, they had sneaked in without alarming Jasper, who was taking a snooze in his room adjoining the kitchen, and proceeded to go through the place at their leisure.

"All at once," exclaimed Trulliber in an awed tone, "something happened that resulted in my being shot. I was over in that corner of the room"—he pointed to a recess near the open fireplace—"when, just as I was going to open the drawer of that writing table, my elbow jogged back against something, and before I knew it the awfulest voice you ever heard starts roaring out, 'Beware! Beware!'"

"The phonograph!" exclaimed Tom to himself. "We never took that record off."

"Before I could do anything, Dan Dark he ups and fires right at the voice, but the bullet entered my poor chest. Anyhow, I sank down there, and Dan Dark and Jeff they takes to their heels. I don't mind Dan's sneaking off. He always was a cur, but it's pretty tough when your own son deserts you. Well, I lay there a while, and then I got to my feet. Just then I heard your holler, and thought it was the others coming back. I determined to put the best face on it I could, and so I pulls myself together somehow and opens the door. The rest you know."

"But how did Jasper come to know you were in the house?" asked Tom.

"Better let him tell it," said Nate Trulliber, with a touch of grim humor.

Bit by bit it was dragged from Jasper, who had appeared brave as a lion since Tom's arrival, that he had come into the room on hearing the shot, but on seeing Nate's wounded form lying on the hearth, he had beaten a precipitate retreat to his

pots and pans, where he had remained till Tom's arrival.

"But where are the others?" exclaimed Tom, as soon as he had been put in possession of these facts.

"Ah reckon dat's dem now!" cried Jasper, as from up the valley there came a loud:

"Hull-o-o-o!"

And "them" it proved to be. Each of my readers may imagine for himself the scene when the Bungalow Boys found themselves reunited. Be assured it was a lively one.

CHAPTER XXV

DARING DEATH

After the first interchange of greetings, congratulations and outpourings of eager questions, Sam Hartley's keen eyes, which had been fixed on Nate Trulliber's shrunken figure, became hard and cold. Had the boys not been too much engrossed in their exchange of experiences, they would have noticed that as Sam entered the room Trulliber's countenance grew even more ghastly than his wound had made it, and that he seemed to grow suddenly old and withered.

"Well, Nate Mullins, it's a long lane that has no turning," said Hartley, addressing the cringing figure.

"Well, I see you know me, Sam Hartley," was the rejoinder; "but if only I'd known of your presence in the valley earlier, you wouldn't have

found me in this fix. As it is, though, I don't much care. Go on. Put the handcuffs on me, and have it over with."

The boys regarded the two in amazement, and as for the professor, his eyes behind his glasses seemed to be bulging out of his head.

"Mullins and Hartley!" he exclaimed. "Vos iss dis foolishness?"

"No foolishness, professor, but rather an unmasking," laughed Hartley. "This man here is Nate Mullins, long the head of one of the most notorious gangs of counterfeiters in the country."

"And you—who may you pe?" gasped the professor, insensibly shrinking from Trulliber, or Mullins, as we must now call him.

"Sam Hartley, of the Secret Service, and very much at *your* service," rejoined the detective. "We had information that Mullins and his gang were operating near to Norton's Cross Roads, and some time ago I got on their track. I made my headquarters in that cave where Tom had such a narrow escape. I never guessed it was going to be such an easy job to nail them as—

thanks to the Bungalow Boys largely—it has turned out to be.”

“That’s right,” assented Nate Mullins. “You’ve caught me good and proper, Sam Hartley, and I suppose I’ll get a long sentence?”

“I don’t know about that,” was the detective’s answer. “The bureau has always thought that you were more sinned against than sinning, Mullins. Your companion, Dan Dark, is the man we want to get particularly, and Bill Trimmers. If you can give us information that will aid in their capture and confess to your operations in this valley, it will go a long way toward mitigating your sentence.”

Mullins readily promised to do this, but made it clear that, had it not been for Dan Dark’s treachery to him in leaving him when he was wounded, he would not have done so. The gang had pitched on the deserted lumber camp as a good place for their operations, it appeared, but at the accidental discovery of the old Indian mine had set up their plant in there. As Hartley had promised, he got off with a light sentence, and

emerged from prison years afterward, a changed man.

"So der noises I heard in dot mine are explained," spoke the professor. "It vos dem counterfeets at work alretty."

"But say," remarked Mullins suddenly. "I'd like it explained to me who it was that scared Dan into firing that shot. Who was it yelled out, 'Beware! beware'?"

Tom walked over to the fallen phonograph and picked it up.

"Let me introduce you to the party!" he exclaimed.

"Well, I'll be gosh-jiggered!" exclaimed Nate Mullins. "Caught by a tin-horn talking machine!"

By this time Jasper announced that supper was ready, and the reunited party—two members of which had been so strangely recruited—sat down to the meal with excellent appetites. Wounded as Mullins was, Sam Hartley did not think it necessary to handcuff him, and the detective and his captive sat side by side at the

table, as if one were not a servant of the government and the other were not a trapped law-breaker.

Mullins had earlier informed the boys that Dan Dark and Jeff Trulliber, or Mullins, had planned to go to the abandoned mine, and did not intend to leave it till early dawn.

Hartley would have liked to take after them at once, but the lateness of the hour and the condition of the lake, the waters of which were rapidly rising, precluded such a possibility. The detective, therefore, was compelled to wait till morning before attempting to secure the remaining members of Mullins' band. Bill Trimmers he regarded as having escaped, not, of course, possessing any knowledge of what had taken place in Bangor. All Mullins could tell him was that Trimmers had started for that city with a valise full of bad money, which had been made in the work-shop in the mine.

Mullins slept, guarded by Hartley, and the night passed without incident. The boys were astir early, and Tom's first business was to gaze

out at the lake. He hardly recognized it. The creek, swollen and discolored by the rainfall of the day before, had enlarged it to such an extent that its mud-colored waters were almost up to the flooring of the small wharf, and apparently rising every moment.

"We must lose no time in opening the flume gates," he said to Sandy; "if we don't, we may find ourselves on an island, instead of in a bungalow."

The day had dawned cloudy and overcast, and before the boys were dressed the rain was descending in a heavy downpour. Tom, however, in storm clothes, started out on his task of opening the flume gates. To do this he had to pass along the top of the dam which formed the lake, over the edge of which small waves were already beginning to lap. It was a perilous task, but despite the pleadings, almost the orders, of the professor not to attempt it, the boy set out.

He reached the centre of the dam without accident, and at once set to work to revolve the

wheel which raised the two big timber "leaves" which formed the entrance to the flume.

After a few turns, the water began to boil into the narrow timber aqueduct with the force of the whole swollen lake behind it. Higher and higher the boy raised the gates, till a mighty torrent was shooting through the flume toward the valley far below. Tom gazed fascinated at the spectacle which the mighty outrush of the waters at his feet presented. Roaring in its narrow confines, the muddy torrent shot down the flume. In the good old days, when lumbering was in its prime, the flood would have carried a mass of mighty timbers down with it, and for this purpose the flume had been made fully ten feet wide, with sides rising three feet or so. When the flood gates were opened, it created a swirling suction far out into the lake, calculated to draw into its grasp any timbers that might be there.

Suddenly Tom's attention was distracted from the waters that boiled at his feet by a sudden shout.

He looked up, and perceived, to his astonish-

ment, that a canoe was out on the lake. Through the driving rain he saw that it had two occupants, both of whom appeared to be engaged in heaving something overboard from it.

"The scoundrels! they're destroying the evidence," said a voice at Tom's elbow.

He faced round, and saw Sam Hartley, who had followed him out onto the dam.

"It's clear enough," shouted the detective above the roar of the waters, "that's Dan Dark and that no-good boy of Mullins'. They've spent the night in the mine, where they had their counterfeiting plant, and now I'll bet a lemon they're casting anything that might prove their guilt to the bottom of the lake."

Indeed, so it seemed. The two watchers on the dam could see from time to time a dull gleam of metal, as another portion of the coiners' illicit appliances was cast from the canoe. So feverishly were the two working that they seemed to care little about the management of their craft, which appeared several times to be on the point of tipping over.

"I reckon they know they can't escape," said the detective grimly, "and figure it out that if they get rid of all their plant there'll be no evidence against them. Oh, Dan Dark is a slick one!"

"If they are not careful, they'll upset," shouted Tom, placing his hands to his mouth funnel-wise to make himself heard above the roar of the escaping water.

"Oh——" he shouted suddenly and stopped.

Where the canoe had been a second before there was only a bobbing speck, while two other specks bobbed near it. What the boy had feared had come to pass. In their feverish haste, Dan Dark and his companion had upset their frail craft.

With fascinated horror, the detective and the boy watched the fight for life that ensued. The shore held another group of anxious watchers, the professor, Sandy and Jasper, while Nate Mullins, his face white and set, stood in grim silence on the porch of the bungalow. His wound precluded his further progress.

"Oh, the coward!" exclaimed Tom suddenly.

Jeff Mullins had fought his way to the side of the half-submerged canoe, and had succeeded in gripping it. But the next instant Dan Dark appeared at his side. There was not a chance that the canoe could support two, and Dan Dark's mind seemed to be made up in a flash. With a terrific blow he knocked the boy from his grip, and the next minute Jeff Mullins vanished under the water.

"Gone!" shouted Sam Hartley. "That's one more score I owe Dan Dark!"

"No; see, there he is. He's swimming!" shouted Tom, pointing.

Sure enough, Jeff was pluckily fighting his way back to the canoe, from which Dan Dark could be seen waving him off.

"Why, they are closer to us!" exclaimed Tom suddenly. "They are coming nearer all the time!"

"By hookey, the current's caught them!" shouted Sam Hartley. "They'll be drawn into the flume! Poor wretches, they are doomed!"

Caught in the cruel grip of the current, closer and closer came the submerged canoe with the man clinging to it, and close beside the white, set face of the swimming boy.

"Close those gates!" roared Sam Hartley, kicking off his boots, coat and waistcoat. "We'll save 'em yet!"

Tom sprang to the wheel, but he had hardly given it the reverse turn which was necessary to close the gates, when the thread of one of the screw gears, rusted by long disuse, broke, and the contrivance jammed. Simultaneously almost with the sharp snap, and the boy's alarming discovery that the gate was jammed, came a loud splash, and Sam Hartley's head presently showed fighting his way through the water to the side of Jeff Mullins.

The detective had leaped into the lake!

"Close the gates!" he shouted back to Tom.

"I can't! They're broken!" screamed the boy, striving desperately to get the great wooden leaves together.

What Sam Hartley thought at that moment

they **did** not learn till long after. But his face went white as he swam, trying with the utmost pitch of his strength to keep out of the current that drew his legs helplessly downward and threatened every minute to draw him under.

Even under these odds, he fought his way to Jeff Mullins' side. But, almost as his hand closed on the boy's collar and he curtly ordered him to tread water, the undertow caught them both, and they were sucked beneath the angry flood like two floating twigs.

A gasp of dismay broke from Tom's lips, and he threw himself flat on his stomach. He knew that for a brief flash they would reappear as they were drawn into the flume. Could he grip and hold them till they were saved?

He had no time to think.

Almost as he threw himself prone, the undertow shot its two victims up, their strained faces peering beseechingly up into Tom's. More by instinct than with any conscious effort, the boy shot out his right hand and gripped Hartley's shirt. It tore loose, but he got a fresh hold.

This time his grip held, and Hartley, with his free hand, seized one of the cross pieces above his head. With his other hand he still gripped Jeff Mullins, whose face was deadly pale, and whose eyes were closed. Partly helped by Tom, and partly aiding himself, Hartley and the boy he had saved were at last in safety on the top of the flume gates, through which the yellow, swollen torrent roared as if in rage at being cheated of its prey.

But one victim the torrent was to claim, and that was Dan Dark.

With a despairing cry, the coward's hold had been wrenched from the canoe as the undertow caught him and dragged him down, and while Tom and Hartley still struggled for the mastery of the current, Dan Dark's body shot by them, hurried down the flume by the dark, muddy flood.

Around and about him swirled the fragments of his broken canoe.

The memory of his face as he shot by to his doom remained long photographed on Tom's

memory. Many a night afterward was he to awaken trembling and agitated from a nightmare in which the last agonized shout of the drowning Dan Dark rang in his ears once more.

Jeff Mullins soon recovered after he had been brought ashore and received attention in the bungalow. Hardly had he recovered consciousness, however, and was relating to Sam Hartley the full details of the last acts of himself and Dan Dark, before there came a sudden hail from the rain-swept hillside above the bungalow. An automobile plastered with yellow mud and rocking from side to side on the rough track came in sight. It rolled up to the bungalow, and from it leaped Inspector Follett, Jack Dacre, the Beetle, the Skeleton and Jared Fogg, who had been picked up on the way.

Not waiting for the branch line train, the inspector had borrowed the auto from a summer cottager near the junction, and made the run in record time.

"So we've got the whole gang," exclaimed the

inspector as, after the boys' breathless greetings, Sam Hartley told him the whole story.

"Yes, all but one, and he's gone to a higher court," said Sam Hartley solemnly.

"But what of Mark Ingalls?" asked Tom. "Did he escape?"

"Left the Cross Roads last night sometime," said Jared Fogg. "We found his horse and rig gone and no sign of him when this inspector here appeared with a warrant for his arrest."

"I'm glad he escaped," thought Tom. "He was a good man at heart, and if he had not fallen into the clutches of the other rascals he would have lived an upright life."

It was afterward learned that Mark Ingalls had indeed determined to shake off the clutches of the band after he had aided Tom to escape. He had driven in the night to a distant railroad station, sold his horse and buggy, and vanished with his little daughter, to begin afresh in some other community.

As for Jeff Mullins, he escaped with a brief term in a reformatory for juvenile offenders.

A few words more and this portion of the adventures of the Bungalow Boys is concluded. Under the guidance of Jeff Mullins, the boys, the professor and the Secret Service men visited the mine into which the professor had fallen so adventitiously, and found that it had been worked to a considerable extent by Nate Mullins and his men. The gang had also used the mine as a housing place for their counterfeiting plant, after they had stumbled upon it by following the movements of Chisholm Dacre. On the advice of Mr. Watson, the boys had the mine carefully examined by experts and its product assayed.

The result was to show that Chisholm Dacre had been misled in his belief as to its riches. There appeared little doubt that at one time it had been rich in lead, but the old Indians, who contrived the secret trapdoor, had pretty well worked the mine out, and what the Trullibers believed to be such a rich discovery was merely the tail ends of the vein.

Incidentally the exploration of the mine led to the unraveling of what had been considerable of

a mystery to the boys, namely how Dan Dark and Jeff Mullins reached the lake side on the morning of the former's death. It was found that they had made use of a secret flight of steps cut in the stone face of the cliff, probably by the Indians, and which natural stairway was screened by bushes. The counterfeiters had a canoe at the foot of the flight, which was kept there for emergencies; but, as Jeff Mullins admitted afterward, they would not have used this but for their belief that the other entrance of the cave was watched by the boys and Sam Hartley.

"So we are not rich, after all," exclaimed Tom one evening, with a laugh; "and the leaden key turned out, after all, not to be the instrument to unlock the gate of fortune, as our uncle dreamed."

"Never mind," laughed Jack. "We've had adventures enough to tell about for the whole of next term at school."

"Won't the fellows open their eyes!" exclaimed the Beetle.

"Open them! They'll have to hold them in

to keep 'em from falling out!" boomed the Skeleton in his deepest tones.

And now began glorious days for the Bungalow Boys and their good-hearted guardian. With the mystery of Sawmill Creek and the lost mine cleared away, they fished and swam and tramped over the mountains to their hearts' content. The lake abounded in fish, and although they had some record catches, they never seemed to exhaust its resources. One thing Tom, on Mr. Watson's advice, had done as soon as possible, and that was to construct an artificial overflow to take the place of the flume gates. Even after they were gone, however, it was a long time before he could wipe from his mind the memory of Dan Dark's end.

One crisp fall day, as the leaves were beginning to turn and the thoughts of the boys began reluctantly to revert to their books once more, the boys received a summons from Mr. Pennington, the lawyer, who had returned from Europe. On their way back to the Audubon Academy they stopped in his office in Bangor, and to their

amazement learned that Chisholm Dacre was not, as they had supposed, dead, but that after the casting away of the *Jessie E. Scotland*, he had been saved and carried to China on a sailing ship that had rescued him. The mystery of the *Scotland's* voyage, however, still remained unsolved.

"Of course that means that we are no longer the Bungalow Boys," said Tom; but there was no bitterness in his heart, nor in that of his brother's, for they were only too glad to learn tune hunters, as he terms you."

"Naturally, the terms of the will do not hold, now that your uncle is alive," smiled the lawyer; "but in Mr. Dacre's dispatch he expressly says that he does not wish to disturb the young fortune hunters, as he terms you."

"I guess, so far as the fortune goes, that we don't come up to his description!" exclaimed Tom.

"But the fun we had and the adventures!" put in Jack. "I wonder if we'll ever have any more like them?"

"Impossible to say," replied Tom, as they re-

joined their companions, who had waited outside Mr. Pennington's office for them.

The boys were not able to foresee that their wish for further stirring times was to be gratified, and that sooner than they expected, too.

By an unexpected turn in their affairs, the Bungalow Boys were shortly to find themselves in situations which were to call forth to the full their ingenuity and resource, and the courage which is the heritage of every true American lad. How they were tried and not found wanting and full details of their exciting adventures and experiences in far different scenes to those to which they were accustomed—as well as something relating to Chisholm Dacre's strange voyage and the mystery of the wrecked vessel—will be told in the next volume of this series, which I shall call: “THE BUNGALOW BOYS MA-ROONED IN THE TROPICS.”

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